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On Mr. Knopf's Spring List:

THE IMMORALIST

by André Gide

TREATISE ON THE GODS

by H. L. Mencken

A TRUE STORY

by Stephen Hudson

Geraint Goodwin

CONVERSATIONS

with

GEORGE MOORE

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1930X

NEW YORK

ALFRED A. KNOPF

1930

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TO

My Mother

Acknowledgments are made to Mr. Moore's publishers, William Heinemann, Ltd., for the quotations that follow.

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Obiter Dicta.

121 Ebury Street,
London, S.W.1,
26*th July* 1929.

Dear Sir Ernest Benn,

I read in your catalogue received last night: ' "Conversations with George Moore" is written and published with Mr. Moore's full approval.' The words 'full approval' are incorrect. Of Mr. Goodwin's book I read but the first two slips, and these seeming to me to be well written I refrained from reading any more—first: for I may not take my thoughts from the writing of 'Aphrodite in Aulis'; second: for if I were to read Mr. Goodwin's conversations with me I should treat them as I treat my own books, rewrite them, and you would be lucky if you got a text you could print from before Christmas. Wherefore to save you from heavy printers' bills and myself from midnight worries I will stand the hazard of some small loss of wit and sense, and charge you to watch for phrases dangerous in law.

My hopes of a full morning's work having been spent in this letter, I return in trivial mood to your catalogue, and am surprised to find on page twelve the words '*compagnons de voyage*'. As I am unable to discern any difference between '*compagnons de voyage*' and 'travelling companions', I am full of curiosity to learn if the writer of the catalogue has discovered a distinction in meaning between the French and English phrase. If he has not discovered any, I should

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like to hear why he prints French words instead of English. True it is that Mr. William de Morgan always sprinkled his pages with French. When I asked this eminent writer why he did so, he answered: 'A page of English seems blunt and cheerless without a French word or two. They attract the reader's eye and please him, and they please me, for I am not very well acquainted with the language,' an answer that sets me thinking that your catalogue-maker is a belated reader of Mr. de Morgan's novels—a possible explanation of '*compagnons de voyage*', but not altogether a satisfying one. Question him I beg of you and let me have the result of your questionings some time between this and Christmas.

Sincerely yours,

GEORGE MOORE

CHAPTER I

THE POINT OF VIEW

This will seem, to those who admire the book, an unfair description of it; but we must not be deceived by the external form—we must, if we would appreciate a writer, take into account his attitude towards life, we must discover if his version is mean or noble, spiritual or material, narrow or wide; for all things are in the eye that sees, the ear that hears, the brain that remembers, the earliest and latest philosophy that is.

GEORGE MOORE—'Avowals'.

WHAT is the enigma of George Moore? An enigma he is himself, even to his closest friends, who never know what he will say, or what he will do, next. But why should his work, the one permanent thing he has left us, the one certainty in the many uncertainties that have been his life, suffer the same hesitant acceptance?

The public—which is not the general public—has been unable to avoid the knowledge that here is a writer at once removed from the body of his contemporaries. His must, somehow, be great work. But *is* it great work? Where, in the final judgment, will he stand—among the elect, or, just failing his place, among the select?

Mr. Moore, it should be said, is possibly the cause of this public wariness. He has done so many things well that they have been led to wonder whether such versatility makes for the doing of some one thing extraordinarily well.

It is an unjust fact [says Mr. G. K. Chesterton] that if

a man can play the fiddle, give legal opinions, and black boots just tolerably, he is called an Admirable Crichton, but if he does all three thoroughly well, he is apt to be regarded, in the several departments, as a common fiddler, a common lawyer, and a common bootblack.

It so happens that the public, remembering some of Mr. Moore's earlier autobiographical books, are led into supposing that he knew too much about life ever to interpret it, and remembering the later books, that he interpreted it too well to have ever known so much about it. For Mr. Moore, when the twenty odd books that have appeared under his name are reckoned with, will be found to have been one of the best journalists the world has known (a man who can make a commercial traveller in a railway carriage appear interesting); one of the few men who have written intelligently on art for people who are not artists; a critic with the keenest of critical faculties and the broadest of judgments; a self-revealer not less rich than Pepys or less spiritually honest than Rousseau; and first a novelist and then a writer of prose-narratives who has given the world 'The Brook Kerith' and a dozen other books which may well claim to be as notable as any within their time.

There has been some hesitancy[1] in assessing Mr.

[1] Or perhaps 'conflict' is the word. Mr. St. John Ervine, in the *Daily Express,* charges him, among other things, with 'intellectual poverty', suggesting he has control over neither character nor theme. Mr. Humbert Wolfe, however, mentioning that he is the 'most impenitent and convinced' Moore admirer, finds him the 'supreme story-teller'. Joining issue, he says: '. . . I would observe that almost alone in contemporary English literature Mr. Moore has brought to the writing of fiction the severity, the discipline, and the perfect control of

Moore in consequence. There has been the George Moore of, and in, 'The Confessions of a Young Man' and 'Hail and Farewell' no less than of 'Avowals' and 'Conversations in Ebury Street', and then lastly there is the George Moore of, but certainly not in, 'Esther Waters' and 'The Brook Kerith'. There would seem to be no reconciliation between the intense egotism of the one and the sublime detachment of the other. George Moore, in his work, not less than in his life, avoids classification.

There is only one thing common to them all and that has been seized upon, not necessarily because it is important, but because, at all events, it is sure. That one thing has been the vehicle of Mr. Moore's thought, a style so remarkably rich that in the heyday of the language it could not have escaped notice and in the raggedness of its decline must stand out.

The difficulty with which Mr. Moore has had to contend is this superb quality of his style. It is not surprising that he has been unable to share wholeheartedly in the praise that has been given the purely extraneous methods by which he seeks to arrive at the end itself. As a creative artist he would demand to be judged on the end and not the means to the end. To praise a writer for his prose is, perhaps, like praising a painter for his palette. And the interpretation which may be put upon excessive praise may be that the means are more important than the end—that here are

art that the French had in their great periods. Mr. Moore has the violent integrity of Flaubert and the artistic rectitude of Anatole France. His work is a Greek statue beside the Flemish riot of life symbolised by such a writer as D. H. Lawrence.'

the whited sepulchres, beautiful without but within full of dead men's bones.

And, confining ourselves to the novels, is it so? Is the thought equal to the expression, the perfect equipoise of great art? This is the judgment that Mr. Moore would himself demand, as witness his remarks on Kipling, that form is only important in so far as life is revealed, or his impatient declaration that art is not made out of art, but out of Nature. 'It is by the power to call souls out of the abyss into life that time judges us,' he has said in one form or another for the past forty years.

And accepting Mr. Moore's text, on which this short sketch is based, how are we to 'take into account his attitude towards life', to discover 'if his version is mean or noble, spiritual or material, narrow or wide'? For here, at the beginning, is another difficulty: the most personal of writers has suddenly become the most impersonal. Between 'Hail and Farewell' and 'Héloïse and Abélard' is a chasm as wide as the grave. The hero of the one is assuredly George Moore, but the hero of the other is just as surely Abélard as George Moore conceives him in the light of history. Ibsen's attitude we know; Shakespeare's attitude, as broad as life itself, we yet know was continually changing; Balzac, Dostoieffsky, Tourgenieff, the great minds of the world—but George Moore? Is he also among the prophets? Their work was coloured by their attitude, however impersonal they may have kept themselves. But Mr. Moore's work, his creative work—though he would not suffer 'creative' to be applied to any one of his books

in preference to another—has, like an Ingres, risen up and assumed its own beautiful proportions, betraying the hand but never the heart of its creator.

We cannot discover an attitude and for that reason arewe right in assuming that an attitude is not there—that the absence of an attitude is the failure to arrive at one? We must ask not only how a man builds, but what he builds on. Is it the house on the rock or the shifting sands? However fine the superstructure, it will not compensate for foundations which are not themselves secure. The writer must, after the manner of the scientist, apply himself to the elements, to the structure of the atom, before he begin on the synthesis. This then is the test: what answer has Mr. Moore found to the question which must present itself to every interpreter of life? He may accept it, or he may reject it, or he may play on a hundred and one variations between acceptance and rejection, or it may be that he simply never worries about it. He will never find a complete answer, it is true, but proceeding by faith, in either direction, he will arrive at some definite finding on which he may build. It is not how he has handled the material but what is the material he has sought to handle. It may not be just to seek his own confessions, for a man may know least of all what he is or be aware of the hidden spirit that works through him. And yet this other side of Mr. Moore—this self-revealing part—is also so real a part of him, that we may be sure the findings of the one are also the findings of the other. And the Mr. Moore of the admissions has told us so often and so plainly what he thinks or what he does not

think of life, of the purpose of life, of mankind and of human destiny.

> Myself when young did eagerly frequent
> Doctor and Saint, and heard great Argument
> About it and about: but evermore
> Came out by the same Door as in I went.

He had indeed found humanitarianism a refuge for men of inferior genius, whether Victor Hugo or Mr. Gladstone.

> Humanitarianism is a pigsty [he wrote] where liars, hypocrites, and the obscene in spirit congregate; it has been so since the great Jew conceived it, and it will be so till the end. Far better the blithe modern pagan in his white tie and evening clothes, and his facile philosophy. He says, 'I don't care how the poor live; my only regret is that they live at all'; and he gives the beggar a shilling.

The George Moore was a young man then, no more sure of himself than of the world around him, and in the process of time he has undergone many transformations. But a failure to arrive at any other finding than that life is an accident is with him in old age as it was with him in youth, and we find him, as late as 1919, writing:

> But in a tale by Tourgenieff we are with life as it exists in our own hearts—sad, unchanging, mysterious. He seems to have brought into the world a perfect comprehension of life. He did not need to learn life from experience; he knew it, and seems to have always been conscious that life is full of folly and evil; that morality is a myth, an academic discussion; and that

> the artist can only teach by giving the world images of beauty.[1]

And then, indeed, retelling one of Tourgenieff's tales, he adds:

> It seemed to me, and it seems to me still, that in this tale we are taken to the verge of life; we seem to look over the very edge; we feel that the great secret is going to be revealed to us.

So this, then, is the great secret. Mr. Moore had gone up aloft on the wings of his art, to say: 'There is nothing.' There was nothing above, though a whole panorama beneath. And now, behold the cloud no bigger than a man's hand! But is it a cloud?—for the great secret is *going* to be revealed to us. Mr. Moore seems to have accepted a ready-made premise in his youth—that life is somehow an accident—and to have found it sufficient throughout his working days. There has been the gospel of beauty, it is true, but that an artist should believe in beauty is no more than that an explorer should believe in his feet. That the artist can only teach by giving the world images of beauty is as old as the first artist, who gave us all that we call beauty and all that we are not pleased to call beauty, and we must have the presumption to assume the

[1] But Tourgenieff, whose sublime detachment Mr. Moore has so warmly embraced, may not confirm this belief. 'From the mysterious decree which prescribes the vocation of men,' said Renan over the great Russian's bier, 'Tourgenieff received the noblest gift of all: he was born essentially impersonal.' But Renan could not but add that 'in his ample breast contradictions were reconciled,' and that 'this philosophy led him to tenderness, to joy of life, to pity for his fellow creatures—above all, for the oppressed. He had an ardent love for our poor humanity . . .'

rôle of the Creator if we are to decide what it is and what it is not. It is better to accept all, or to enter into an attitude of acceptance, than to attempt to make so arbitrary a decision. This implies a faith in many things, not least in that thing which is loosely called humanity, even at the cost of being counted among 'the liars, hypocrites, and the obscene in spirit.' And this faith in humanity, Mr. Moore, by his own confession, does not possess. And so we begin by taking Mr. Moore as a great artist, endowed with almost every quality but the saving grace of faith. He is, as Mr. Chesterton describes Mr. Shaw, 'like the Venus de Milo—perfect, but incomplete.'

Life, it would seem, is something to be observed from without and not lived from within. Mr. Moore, it often seems, would regard life as something to write about —the provocation of many fine stories—rather than as something which has seized upon him as the interpreter of its own hidden secret. It is a pageant, and we, who are in the position of observers, observe and record; and it may be that the world, interested as it always is, will be interested also in our records.

More must be said if it is to be taken in proof, and since this is only a point of view, the more shall be said quickly. Mr. Moore's detachment, a too obvious impersonality, was never more in evidence, we think, than in his choice of the subject of 'The Brook Kerith.' Even his biographer, Mr. John Freeman, is forced to admit that he approached the story of Christ as 'a man of letters.' One can approach the sacred story as a believer or as a sceptic, and we realise the viewpoint.

The one believes, and the other is moved sufficiently to voice his disbelief—but both are moved. The man of letters' point of view is, presumably, that of an observer. None of the passions are touched, but all the faculties are exercised. It was Mr. Aldous Huxley who remarked, in his mordant way, that the man of letters could convert the Christian epic into a first-rate de Maupassant short story, judging His prophecies in the light of His subsequent fate. Mr. Moore, it is true, proceeded in good faith. We can see Anatole France approaching a sacred subject with a snigger, but Mr. Moore stepping lightly over the hallowed ground, eyes open in wonder as the new vista opens before him. And having seen, full of a new joy, he next proceeded to record.

And the suggestion already made that Mr. Moore's greatest handicap may be his style, is not to imply that a man's worth is in inverse ratio to his method of expression. The crux of the matter indeed is: What is style? If we accept Buffon's dictum that the style is the man, we see that the man that is George Moore is indisputably triumphant throughout: that he is a novelist on top of his characters, the characters never on top of their creator. The merits of 'Hail and Farewell' are no longer the merits of 'Héloïse and Abélard.' The qualities of the one may come to be the defects of the other. The people are given the rich apparel of Mr. Moore's choice when, if they had had their own way, they might rather have tumbled about in rags. A man's style, Mr. Moore might say, may be forged in the furnace of his own thought, but if the

result does not meet with the prescribed demands—not necessarily its own demands—back it must go into the crucible.

'But shall I ever be able to explain to the reader what I mean by literary heat? . . .' (Mr. Moore is discussing St. Paul.) 'Now having been prompted, all men should understand that the farewell did not come out of the mind but out of the heart; that which comes straight out of the heart by thought.'

But suppose, coming straight out of the heart by thought, it was not good English?

Within recent times there have been two men who have devoted to literature that singleness of purpose which no one can deny Mr. Moore. It happened that both of them had individual styles, and Mr. Moore, a literary buccaneer, brought his broadside to bear not so much on the men as on their styles.

Of George Meredith, he wrote:

> He puts on his style so thickly that we can barely see his people, and have to peer through the dazzling page to catch sight of them. They seem to be doing a great deal, but in truth the most that can be said is that they are dancing to literary rhythms—a thing which, however, cannot be said of any other novelist. His habit is not slattern; there is no trace of the crowd about him; he is one whose love of art is pure and untainted with commercialism, and if I may praise it for nought else, I can praise it for this.

But Stevenson was 'a consumptive youth, weaving garlands of sad flowers with pale, weak hands, or leaning to a large plate-glass window, and scratching

thereon exquisite profiles with a diamond pencil,' and he adds:

> Mr. Stevenson is competent to understand any thought that might be presented to him, but if he were to use it, it would instantly become neat, sharp, ornamental, light and graceful, and it would lose all its original richness and harmony. It is not Mr. Stevenson's brain that prevents him from being a thinker, but his style.

The moral, if moral there be, has been pointed out by Francis Thompson:

> A lesson, this, deserving to be conned by a generation so opposite in tendency as our own; a lesson that in poetry, as in the Kingdom of God, we should not take thought too greatly wherewith we shall be clothed, but seek first the spirit, and all these things will be added unto us.

The suggestion is not that Mr. Moore's style is too good, but that it is *always* too good. The limpid waters of the pool are never shattered, for neither angel of tenderness nor the devil of a wild despair is ever allowed to trouble this Bethesda. And, indeed, style to Mr. Moore is a difficult thing. Towards it go infinite care, infinite patience. There is not so much the right word as the right semicolon. And here we would enquire what part inspiration plays. None, Mr. Moore says—unless the inspiration is in the corrections. The reply is that the text of Isaiah would be found to have few emendations. Mr. Moore is silent a minute. Did I know that Dowden's text of the first draft of the 'Epipsychidion' was flat? So Shelley corrected? Certainly.

But if Shelley corrected much, there was much that

Shelley had no cause to correct. Can we not say that the measure of a man's greatness is what comes from without? And that which comes from without often stands stark and naked and unashamed, without need of the embellishment of however rich a garment. That wild fury, unreasoning, unrelenting. 'A tale told by an idiot,' Mr. Moore might add, 'full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.'

. . . . . .

Having sought patiently to arrive at a true estimate of Mr. Moore, one must, to retain it, forget a great many of Mr. Moore's own pronouncements. For while he has prescribed his life in one direction, his sympathies go to those who have followed another. A thing of beauty may be a joy for ever, but he finds little worth in him who gave the phrase and spent his life interpreting it. Keats is, to him, 'a pussy blinking on a sunny lawn,' and in a few moments his conversation has wandered to Shelley: Mozart we may say, but his talk is of Wagner; Raphael, surely, but he would walk all the way to Professor Tonks to tell him of Michael Angelo; Tourgenieff, but the other great story-teller of the world he would have as Balzac—Balzac, through whom, as a young man, he had seen:

> . . . cloud-capped mountains, great gulfs of sea-water flowing up and reflecting as in a mirror the steep cliff's side; the straight white feet are set thereon, the obscuring weft of flesh is torn, and the pure strange soul continues its mystical exhortations. Then the radiant vision, a white glory, the last outburst and manifestation, the trumpets of the apocalypse, the colour of

heaven, the closing of this stupendous allegory—Seraphita lying dead in the rays of the first sun of the nineteenth century:

and whom a more mature judgment had set down as 'a great harvester and his sheaves were souls,' remarking that he never took surreptitious pleasure in the art of writing.

No man, in spirit and temper, has as surely gone back in his work, and no man has as surely gone forward in his life, as George Moore. It was he, we might remember, who recognised the Impressionists almost before they had recognised themselves; and 'Modern Painting,' as it was the first, is still the best, of the books which were to theorise the aspirations of perhaps the most important art movement since the Renaissance. Yet Mr. Moore continues to write as he would like to imagine the first man wrote, and not, as Mr. Joyce, the last. If, one might say, this man would worship art as a thing in itself, what has he to do with Wagner or with Balzac? The reason is that in his breast, unlike Tourgenieff's, contradictions are not reconciled but exist side by side. The explanation rests as much on his catholicity of taste as on his protestant spirit. The George Moore who would intrude himself in 'Hail and Farewell' and would so completely exclude himself from 'The Brook Kerith' is yet one and the same man.

And as a critic, it is just because Mr. Moore is so free from a point of view—because, if we may say so with no disrespect, his point of view is the absence of a point of view—that he is so fine an appraiser of

others. He is not so much a critic as a kind of diviner. Your critic is sure to blast something or other in the course of a dozen pages, but Mr. Moore blasts nothing, though he lashes many things; a hazel switch in one hand and a horsewhip in the other—this is his symbolic journey across English letters. It may be many years before he is believed, but experience has proved that he can be believed.

. . . . . .

And yet, coming to the world of the novels, we find, in face of everything, that Mr. Moore has somehow triumphed over, or, rather, in spite of, his limitations. What is the explanation? It is, we believe, that a man who has no view of life is pre-eminently fitted by Nature for the rôle of realist. He only can be a disinterested spectator, assimilating the evidence after the manner of an Assize Court Judge, his passions never roused because they have never been exercised. It is true that there are few such minds that exist in their original state. They have been grafted, as it were, with the itch of social righteousness and its variations, important and yet relatively unimportant adjuncts, which suffice only to wrench out of alignment a mind destined for equilibrium. To the man with a view of life they are an integral part, but to the acquisitive and impersonal mind they are no more than externals.

Now, these are the very qualities that have stood Mr. Moore in such good stead: he has never tried to prove anything, because he has nothing to prove; to lead the way, because he is himself not sure of the direction.

It may seem paradoxical to see the peculiar characteristics of Zola or of Mr. George Moore in 'Middlemarch' [says Edmund Gosse in a paper on George Eliot, whom he regards as the direct forerunner of them both]. Like them, she sees life as an organism, or even as a progress. George Eliot in her contemplation of the human beings she invents is a traveller, who is provided with a map. No Norman church or ivied ruin takes her by surprise, because she has seen that it was bound to come, and recognises it when it does come. Death, the final railway station, is ever in her mind: she sees it on her map, and gathers her property around her to be ready when the train shall stop.

But it is because George Moore has, what George Eliot never had, not only a mind free from pedantry, but an imagination which exists outside the intellect, that peculiarly fits him for his appointed task. He has all George Eliot's virtues and none of her disadvantages. He, alone, perhaps, of all English writers, can achieve that 'luminous hallucination' which Gosse finds in Flaubert. It is for this reason that 'The Mummer's Wife' and the other novels can well claim to be the finest realistic novels in English.

Remembering this, we may the better understand how a writer in the twentieth century should now be engaged on a story of the time of Pericles.

'A great artist,' he told the writer, 'is either before his time or behind it.' Mr. Moore is most certainly behind it. In an age of Mr. Wells and Mr. Shaw (and the smaller Wellses and Shaws) he is an anachronism. 'To go back,' one might say, 'is surely to lose ground': but one must remember the point of view—that ideas, if not progress, are an illusion; the reali-

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ties were all in the Garden of Eden. Héloïse loved and suffered, so did the servant girl, Esther Waters. If one thinks love a subject for a novel, one may write about either—or both. The writer is no more investing the past with the present than the present is invested with the past. He has defended himself, when called upon to do so: as witness his answer to a critic who suggested that the Courts of Love, of which he had made great use in 'Héloïse and Abélard,' were now regarded as a legend. Mr. Moore wrote that the humanist

> arrives at a true idea of the twelfth century by remembering that what humanity is, humanity always was.

. . . . . .

Does it come off? Because Mr. Moore has so gone back in spirit as well as in subject matter, because the world he re-creates seems to many of us to be a true and living picture of the times, we think that it does. He is not probing about in a past century for a colourful episode to delight a jaded and mechanised age. His early training as a realist would teach him to avoid history if he could not improve upon it. A certain full-flavoured ripeness, rich and mellow, like an old wine, is here—the tang of another day, another age. Men disport themselves, there is love that the troubadours and gleemen sing, and women

> As sweet and musical
> As bright Apollo's lute, strung with his hair;
> And when love speaks, the voice of all the gods
> Makes heaven drowsy with the harmony.

And 'The Brook Kerith,' of all his books, would lead

one to forget all reservations. As the book continues, the narrative proceeds effortlessly, from out the low and clear melody of the prose, the perfect balance of colour and line, the simple dignity of the theme, until it seems to arrive at the very finality of art. Many circumstances combine to make it a masterpiece; the grandeur of the subject lifts it to a level of the style, and the story, a simple story simply told—for it has been told before—calls only for Mr. Moore's well-proved qualities of objectivity. But there is even something more. It may be that George Moore, as he describes his friend Dujardin, was returning 'penitent to Christ'—returning, inasmuch as he was to find that in this, the simplest of all stories, is the inspiration and comfort of mankind.

Had Mr. Moore written only this book, it would have been sufficient to ensure him permanent fame.

. . . . . .

CHAPTER II

EXAMPLE AND PRECEPT

In such an hour of artistic convulsion and renewal of thought thou wast, and thou wast a magnificent rallying point for all comers; it was thou who . . . by thy holy example didst save us—from all base commercialism, from all hateful prostitution; thou wast ever our high priest. . . .

GEORGE MOORE—'Confessions of a Young Man.'

The worst slavery of all is to be set to perform tasks that are out of our instinct. . . . We have forsworn our hands and invented machines that do badly what the hands did well; . . . a well-meaning race is the race of man, but incurably stupid, and going from bad to worse.

GEORGE MOORE—'Conversations in Ebury Street.'

THE preceding pages have been devoted to an estimate, inadequate enough as it has been, of Mr. Moore's work, and if something is now said about his influences it will be of the same brief and cursory nature. The influences, it should be pointed out, are limited, in particular, to the narrow and exclusive viewpoint of other writers. It has already been explained that Mr. Moore is morally, intellectually, and aesthetically a kind of throw-back. That he should have revolutionised anything, least of all the English novel—most slow-moving of things—is therefore a matter of wonder. The word 'revolution' is a curious word to apply to Mr. Moore in so far as his own creative work goes, though no one denies that in his championings his place has always been near the front in almost every

modern movement in the arts. Here at once is the difficulty: to consider him in the light of his own claim to have established the aesthetic novel in English—a claim which, to the writer at least, demands a clear-cut idea of what an 'aesthetic' novel is—and in his broader significance as possibly the last inviolable stronghold against the pervasive tendencies of the time, tendencies which may be roughly grouped under the headings of mass-production and commercialism.

Since every novel that was ever written, if it was an expression of anything at all, can claim to be, in some measure, a work of art, it must follow that the 'aesthetic' novel differs only in degree. It may be said, perhaps, that the old novel was less consciously a work of art than the new or aesthetic novel, an arbitrary judgment which cannot be supported. But even so, Mr. Moore will say, 'the rules of art are made to be broken as a woman is dressed in order that she may be undressed'; and as the aesthetic novel is at least the sum total of many rules of art, the undressing of it—or the breaking of them—should be anything but a crime, whether it be by Richardson, who knew little about dress, or Joyce, who has deliberately discarded it. But that Mr. Moore *did* bring something over with him after his long exile in France cannot be gainsaid. And that that something must inevitably have included a more rigorous application to the technical demands of novel-writing must also be admitted. But what, we think, was of more importance was a mind and thought so divorced from traditional smugness and cant, a mental chastity so wild and inviolable,

that it made for an inroad on anything. Then, as now, there were new thoughts abroad and it was good for a young man to be alive: and the impressionable George Moore flitted hither and thither, extracting pollen like a butterfly, a picker-up of unconsidered trifles, never sure that he would lie down with his waking thoughts. This man had already been a disciple of Zola—a discipleship which he himself imagined he had renounced, but which he had renounced only in the detail that, while it is but right to see everything, there is no need to describe what has no other purpose than to make the reader vomit.

With such a combination of circumstances anything might happen, but the one thing which was certain to happen happened. Mr. Moore's books were instantly proclaimed immoral, the libraries came between him and his public, and at the outset of his career he was forced to choose between retreat and a certain solitary and hazardous advance. He may have taken heart in the knowledge that in England immorality and immortality are separated by no more than forty or fifty years. At all events, nothing better could possibly have happened. That an artist must find a public is as certain as that a man must find a wife, but this upset on the betrothal night meant that he might some day return on his own terms instead of remaining on hers—that is to say, the public's.

Throughout the latter part of his working life Mr. Moore, since his books have been issued in limited editions, has had the smallest public of almost any worthy man of letters. He has had his thousands and

the others have had their tens of thousands, but his resolution remains unaltered. He has accepted it as his due, and has never winced under a penalty he has brought upon himself.[1]

The more an artist the man be, the more his influence is by example and not precept. And Mr. Moore's influence by the example of his work is one which few of his fellow-writers would dispute. Enough has been said concerning style, but if we separate style from language (as the finished fabric from the weft) we must grant Mr. Moore a knowledge of, and mastery over, our tongue seldom equalled. Most of us bandy words carelessly; familiarity and the currency of daily use have worn away the edges. Someone with a sense of humour and a small capacity for research might easily prove how, so far from expressing ourselves in our language, we contrive to disguise, or at least attenuate, our own thought.

The times may indeed be out of joint and the language of Shakespeare reserved for the schoolroom, since jargon and slang—not the hard, blunt slang of the worker, often expressive enough, but the devitalised thing of our pseudo-educated classes—have done their worst. But at least let it be said that Mr. Moore, in a last grand and arrogant gesture, led the language back to its beginnings.

> So far as my small power permits me [he writes], I have striven hard to accustom the London drawing-

[1] In fact, if the truth is known, he has taken a roguish pleasure in his truancy, as the incident he told me suggests. During these times his greeting to Sir Hall Caine on the stairs of Heinemann's was: 'Here meet the biggest circulation and the smallest.'

room to the word *belly*, being convinced there is no real morality in substituting *stomach* for *belly*; and invariably I interrupt her who speaks of her dog as a lady: Madam, I suppose you refer to your bitch.

There was an occasion when Mr. Moore was retelling the story of 'The Brook Kerith,' and his rich voice rose and fell in the measured cadences of the rhythm, only to bring up the listener with a start at the breaking in of the word 'yoe.' And what is a 'yoe,' Mr. Moore? A yoe, he explained, was the word he had employed for a ewe. It may not have been the correct word—the word in common usage—but he had found the shepherds employed it in their own native speech, and as it suggested the female sheep as no other word, he had taken it for his narrative. (And then in turn he would enquire the meaning of Town Councillor.)

But this full-flavoured richness, whether of speech or of writing, is but a part of the whole. The whole may be best described as Mr. Moore himself. It is the irony of things that an ancestor, albeit a distant one, should have given the world the idea of an Utopia, for nothing is farther from Mr. Moore's thoughts. Had he to compete with Sir Thomas for the most beautiful of all worlds, he would probably compromise with himself and suggest the eighteenth century. But beyond that he would not go. Few have seen more plainly than he the tendency of the age, and no one can foresee better than he that the tendency of the age cannot be checked by a few pious revivals of folk-dancing in a lecture-hall, or the spasmodic efforts at rural

handicraft. His ideal is the world of the craftsman and the best age, that age that made possible the craftsman's widest self-expression. For his own part, he will at least be true to what he conceives best. It was a stipulation of his, I think, that his books be hand-set (as it is that his pictures be hand-painted); and though necessity has caused him to compromise with a typewriter, there never has been, nor ever will be, a telephone in his house in Ebury Street. When the photographers write to him for a sitting, he replies graciously enough that he will be pleased to be photographed, making the one stipulation that it must be by daguerreotype. The reply is that the apparatus has long been superseded, and Mr. Moore qualifies his approval. 'Even photography has been commercialised,' is his comment.

'In the eighteenth century,' he told the writer in his own vigorous way, 'the working man loved a beautiful thing as the child loves a doll—and now——'

The tendencies of the times he can endure with stoicism, however much they may rile him; but the one calamitous error, when he cannot always bring himself within the compass of ordered speech, is education. His reasons he has given, in some measure, in the pages that follow, but if one can sum it up in a sentence, these are his words as given the writer:

'What is the use of bringing the ploughman and the ditcher to the big cities, to turn them into rotters? In the old days the man learned how to make a good

hedge, whatever else he did. Hedges must still be made —and who is to make them?'

Ripeness is all, and on the score of ripeness who will gainsay that Mr. Moore's world has much to recommend it?

CHAPTER III

. . . in Nature there are always discrepancies, which the writer must remove lest they jar. But I will be daring; nothing shall be excluded and on my reader I must rely to harmonise what I am about to say with what I have already said.

GEORGE MOORE—'Conversations in Ebury Street.'

ANYONE who approaches the biography of Mr. Moore cannot avoid the unhappy thought that he is competing with Mr. Moore himself. Unless he be vainglorious or have a low estimate of Mr. Moore's powers, he will not find encouragement in that knowledge. Beyond the fact that he is the greatest living authority on himself, one has only to recall with what consummate art he has contrived to present himself to the public to realise that if it could be done better, it is more likely that it cannot be done as well. There is an expression still used in Fleet Street—though its significance has gone—which runs: Bring me the scissors and paste and I will write the leader. We can therefore imagine the official biographer—if Mr. Moore's ghost is unable to rise and prevent such desecration—busy with the paste and scissors. The bindings will be off the 'Confessions,' off 'Memoirs of My Dead Life,' off 'Hail and Farewell,' while the jig-saw puzzle continues to grow apace; and, when the work of desecration is completed, and the vast volume takes shape, the perpetrator of the outrage, we will imagine, sits back with a sigh, striving to forget Euclid's words about a part and a whole.

What then is the justification? It is just this: that a man is not always the best judge of the qualities that mean the most to his associates. For example, there is little question that whatever a past generation thought of Marie Corelli, it was unable to believe, as earnestly as she, that the mantle of Shakespeare had, in the process of time, assumed the outlines of a skirt; nor would Mr. Pepys have imagined for one moment but that the qualities—if any—which were destined to reach beyond him, were any but those associated with a patient and industrious attention to the affairs of State.

Mr. Moore, if only that, almost alone of public men, he has carried truth to the disconcerting length of saying what he thinks—and does—has gone far towards setting himself in a truer perspective. The public is therefore free to make its own choice, and the choice it makes is often irrespective of what we may style the 'heroic' qualities. This Mr. Moore, who rightly prides himself on his character drawing, no doubt knows: that the strongest case may be made to prove that we like a man not for his strength but his weakness; not for the qualities we feel we should admire, but for the qualities we feel we should not. For that matter, what apostle has quite the lovableness of St. Peter? The key, indeed, to this brief sketch must be St. Peter [and, in spirit at least, since we are drawing apostolic comparisons, St. Paul], always remembering, as a thing worth remembering, that the standards have been inverted.

To approach Mr. Moore we must begin by a brief

preliminary discussion, attributing the affection he so obviously inspires, as we have explained, to the defects of his virtues. And if a label is necessary (how futile are labels), we would do best to describe him as 'pure artist.' Because the artist is not an entirely rational man, nor always a happily married man, nor, again, an amenable man, he cannot afford to disregard all that the average man sets so much store upon, without bringing upon himself some of that average man's scorn, and certainly some of his curiosity.

> The true artist [Mr. Shaw makes a character say in one of his grand extravagances] . . . will let his wife starve . . . sooner than work at anything but his art. To women he is half-vivisector, half-vampire. He gets into intimate relations with them to study them, to strip the mask of convention from them, to surprise their inmost secrets, knowing that they have the power to rouse his deepest creative energies, to rouse him from his cold reason, to make him see visions and dream dreams, to inspire him, as he calls it.

But long before, Mr. Moore had made his conscience say much the same sort of thing when he wrote: 'Would you seduce the wretched servant girl if by doing so you could pluck out the mystery of her being and set it down on paper?'

In recent times the Hon. John Collier has written a book, 'The Religion of the Artist': it may be all there, but it is certain that, among other notable instances, Ibsen anticipated the Hon. John Collier forty years ago in his last play, 'When We Dead Awaken.' It is certainly all *there*, though Mr. Moore himself

would have nothing of the book—a mere 'parodying of himself,' a 'kind of raking out of cinders,' he will add with some heat.

In so far as a man approaches the pure artist is he likely to exhibit the qualities of the artist, and it is enough to say that Mr. Moore is very much the artist. This, then, is the first finding: that Mr. Moore's life has been directed to an ideal, and what comes between him and that ideal is not likely to find favour in his eyes, just as that which is to aid in its attainment is likely to be pressed into service at some time or another.

> And I walked about the King's Bench Walk [he will tell you in 'Hail and Farewell'], thinking what a wonderful thing it would be to write a book in a new language or in an old language revived and sharpened to literary usage for the first time. We men of letters are always sad when we hear of a mode of literary expression not available to us, or a subject we cannot treat. After discussing the Humbert case for some time, Dujardin and a friend fell to talking of what a wonderful subject it would have been for Balzac, and I listened to them in sad silence. 'Moore is sad,' Dujardin said. 'He is always sad when he hears a subject he may never hope to write.'
>
> 'The Humbert case being involved in such a mass of French jurisprudence that——' And they laughed at me.

And again, this time in 'Conversations in Ebury Street,' he is at pains to reveal himself, at whatever cost. He cannot, he will not, repudiate himself, but he will tell the truth; and the truth is, shall we say, so true that we admire it for its own sake. He had been

to see Wilson Steer in Chelsea (so he relates in 'Conversations in Ebury Street'), and his 'friend's nobility made short the journey to Ebury Street.' He it was whose old housekeeper was dying, and:

> I cannot tell at what moment I was proudest of my friend—when I noticed that he had lowered the tone of the blue vase, or when I learnt incidentally that he had spent the summer painting in a county that did not suit him, because of a train service that would bring him to London in a couple of hours if a telegram should summon him to the old lady's bedside. In Sloane Square I stopped to ask myself if I would leave a book I was writing, to sit by a dying woman, giving to her the only gift that I could of value, a touch of the hand, the sound of my voice, and she eighty-six years old? I pursued my way through Eaton Square downcast and yet pleased to find a self in me, an ultimate self, I said; and this is why I can do nothing if disciplined, being wholly and irreparably given to art. We cannot repudiate ourselves; even the saints failed to regret their past sins, and they did well, for without sin there is no repentance and we are as the beasts of the field.

This, then, is the first primary colour in the variegated pattern that is George Moore, off-set as it is by many others, so that its high lights are lowered, and its harshness relieved in the general design.

When to the dispassionate sincerity of the artist is linked the elfin ingenuousness of a child, what may not happen? But a certain child-likeness is a quality one cannot ignore—a child-likeness no less manifest in the man than in much of his work. Such is the confusion of our language that even now, in spite of the drilling of school exercises, we confuse the word

'child-like' with 'childish.' That Mr. Moore, who retains the capacity of childhood in mature growth, may have some measure of both, may also be true—for the qualities are the light and shade of childhood, and we may retain the one without entirely discarding the other—but the shadow is lost in the light.

Proof, if proof is needed, is to be found in a hundred passages which could be quoted—passages which reveal the purity of a child's thought and the vision of a child's eye. Here is one gathered carelessly:

> I can see the great hay-ricks over against the stables and the old pine in which the goldfinches built their nests, and brighter than day now is the day when the old servant took me out one morning and showed me the nest up on the high bough. . . . By my fireside in Ebury Street I can relive the delightful life of the 'sixties again, seeing everyone in his or her occupation, and every room unchanged, unaltered; my nursery with a print between window and door showing three wild riders leaping a wooden fence in a forest. The schoolroom overlooking the yard is before my eyes—the yard is in ruins but its homely life lives on—the mule, toiling always, bringing up water from the lake . . . through the long bog to the next bridge, to discover a crayfish in the brook—it is a wonderful thing to see a crayfish and not to know it is a crayfish—and to remember Primrose and Ivory, two ponies dead fifty years or more, and the day my mother drove me to Ballyglass to see the mail coach swing round the hillside.

'It is a wonderful thing to see a crayfish,' you understand, a *wonderful* thing. So it had been seventy years ago, but the wide-eyed joyfulness of that first discovery he can capture again: for the heart that could

wonder then can wonder now. That precious quality may be, as Thompson would say, no more than to turn pumpkins into coaches and mice into horses, lowness into loftiness and nothing into everything.

And further proof is to be found in his disconcerting emphasis on truth, whether in relation to himself or to others. It is a quality, shall we say, that exists in default of the more adult quality of dissembling. Children, who set least store on the world's values, are possibly the most truthful. It is the child-like capacity to set a greater store on truth than convention, at whatever the cost. 'What is truth?' says Pilate, and we can well imagine George Moore answering Pilate roundly, 'For me it is what I think.'

And if we seek further we shall find, in the vanity of his egotism, just as strong and abiding an evidence. It is so harmless a vanity, so delightful a vanity, one might say, that one is almost led into believing vanity a virtue. It is as far removed from the vanity of some of his contemporaries as they are removed from him. It is the vanity of the child—of that time when we were pleased to count ourselves the king of infinite space. Therefore, when Mr. Moore would tell you that 'The Brook Kerith' is 'the only prose epic in the English language—not as good as Homer—not as good as Milton, but written adequately,' one must not imagine that he really believes it, but that, having attempted something, he is pleased with its fulfilment, as one was with one's first bow and arrow. The other man will never be led into admitting that his work is good or even praiseworthy, but—and here is the rub

—he would rather you had not said so, had you thought it. I can imagine Mr. Moore quarrelling with a critic who questioned the authority of his sources, but I cannot imagine him quarrelling with a critic who suggested his work was but indifferently good—still less exhorting posterity to his side. So far from regarding it as heresy, he would probably admire it for an honest expression of opinion. 'X, who counts his sales in millions, told me he could always trust himself to the great hearts of the British Public'—this as a Parthian shot one evening. 'The great hearts of the British Public, pah! what does it mean? Of all my books, the one that is likely to last fifty years—no, let us say twenty-five—is "The Brook Kerith." But whether it will be read in twenty-five years' time I should not like to say. We can no more say what will happen then than we can say what will happen to us when we are dead.' One more instance. 'I am most anxious to read "Héloïse and Abélard." ' 'I will lend you a copy willingly.' 'Thank you—they say it is your best.' 'Oh, *that*?'—(with a wave of his hand)—'I thought you meant *the real thing*.'

And what anecdote, of the many anecdotes told of Mr. Moore, can be more apt than the following? An American journalist some years ago was questioning the author about an early book of his, 'Mike Fletcher,' which he had refused to allow into the American edition of his works. Mr. Moore was in no two minds about the book, and in the course of a few minutes he gave the journalist to understand that, if it was not

actually the worst, it was very nearly the worst, book ever written.

'What is the book about?' Mr. Moore was asked.

'I don't know; I can't conceive! I can't rewrite it for the very reason that I can't discover what it is about,' was the reply.

'It's a novel, I suppose?'

'It says so on the title-page, but I personally can't discover that it has any subject or any merit whatsoever,' was the answer.

But here again Mr. Moore has revealed himself, and in no uncertain way. His readers will remember a passage which, of all others, explains his disbelief in himself—the real man that underlies the George Moore the public are sometimes led to believe in:

> Within the oftentimes bombastic and truculent appearance that I present to the world, trembles a heart shy as a wren in the hedgerow, or a mouse along the wainscotting. The slight success that has attended my writings did not surprise my relations as much as it surprised me, and what seems to me curious is that, if the success had been twice what it was, it would not have restored to me the confidence in myself that I lost in childhood. I am always a novice, publishing his first book, wondering if it is the worst thing ever written; and I am as timid in life as in literature. It is always difficult for me to believe that my friends are glad to see me. I am never quite sure that I am not a bore. . . . 'The Confessions' are coming back to me. Rousseau realised in age that in youth Rousseau was a shy, silly lad, with no indication, apparently, of the genius that awaited him in middle age, always blundering and never with the right word on his lips. But I do not think that Rousseau was obsessed by

> a haunting sense of his own inferiority—not, at any rate, as much as I am—and I am not sure that he realised sufficiently that the braggart wins but foolish women and the vain man has few sincere friends. If it had not been for my unchanging belief in my own unworthiness, I might easily have believed in myself to the extent that my contemporaries believe in themselves, and there is little doubt that many of them believe themselves to be men and women of genius. . . .

The suggestion is that while no one will deny Mr. Moore his vanity, one must also admit that it is a vanity not peculiarly orthodox.

This naïve innocence of a great part of the world, and most of all, and in spite of his own searching, of himself, is a quality before which we have to capitulate. Stories there are in plenty, but one must mention but two: one he relates himself, and the other is one of many related of him. 'Confessions of a Young Man' was appearing in a French magazine, while in the meantime 'The Mummer's Wife' had been completed, and the author, mindful of a promise by Zola, had gone to him with the object of soliciting a preface. Zola, we can imagine, points to the 'Confessions,' to the passages in which he is referred to as seeking immortality in a description of a linen-draper's shop, to the suggestion that if the shop conferred immortality the merit was the linen-draper's who created it and not that of the novelist who described it. . . . 'But, my dear young man!' The young author appeals, expostulates, but to no purpose. How could Zola possibly have been offended at the harmlessness of the remarks? It was true that he had also reproached the old man with lack of style, had remarked on 'Not a single new or

even exact observation,' had made a figurative allusion to the reporting in the *Figaro* and said something about Provincials *conquering* Paris!

The other incident discovers Mr. Moore somewhere in the ghostly nothingness of North London. As was Balzac's practice, he had suddenly interrupted his work to confirm some point of local colour. There was, as he had visualised it, a park, or at least a green of some sort, lamp-posts, a line of spiked palings. . . . He travels northward in a 'bus, disembarks at the spot where the scene should be, and after a fruitless search enquires of a policeman. We must imagine the policeman with mild insistence suggesting that there was no such place thereabouts. 'But,' says Mr. Moore in a last appeal, 'but it must be here—*I have described it in my book.*'

That he is an Irishman is important only in an unimportant sense. To suggest that he is an Irishman is to call up visions—such is popular imagination—of twilight, of the something that has been loosely labelled 'Celtic mysticism.' One must therefore qualify the word Irishman in some way or another, if only in suggesting that in this respect, if in no other, Mr. Moore is not true to type. Twilight there may be, a very beautiful Irish twilight, but it has no part in him, and almost alone of Irish writers, he has never been tempted by the story of Deirdre. Yet an Irishman he most certainly is, as Irish history will testify, and the roots of what is most permanent in his illusiveness may be traced to Moore Hall, to which no reference will here be made.

And yet, when we say that he is an Irishman in an unimportant sense, we are probably wrong, for many of his characteristics—not least the delight of flouting authority—are the characteristics of his country.

> Though personally one of the kindest men in the world, he has often written really in order to hurt, not because he hated any particular man (he is hardly hot and animal enough for that) but because he really hated certain ideas, even unto slaying.

This has not, as it might appear, any special reference to Mr. Moore, but is yet another remark of Mr. Chesterton's on that equally provocative Irishman, Mr. Shaw. And in the same chapter we may read: 'The Irish make bulls for the same reason that they accept Papal bulls. It is better to speak wisdom foolishly like the Saints, than to speak folly wisely like the dons.' Mr. Moore, it must be granted, seldom writes wisdom foolishly, but he has before now spoken wisdom foolishly, and has with some surprise found that his words do not always carry the interpretation he put upon them. Therefore, when it is explained that Hardy's name and fame are not pleasant in his hearing, and when one hears the view expressed, with some vehemence, that Hardy is 'a village schoolmaster,' we must remember that this is wisdom spoken foolishly; and if we care to hear him explain himself, as he does well enough in his books, we shall see what he means.

And while no two men have less in common than Mr. Moore and Mr. Shaw, no two could in some respects approach more closely. The irony of it, the conquest

of Ireland, and two free-lances, one a Parsifal and the other a Sir Roger Kay, each intent on chasing the wild beast out of the dark wood that is English letters and thought! What parable of these prodigals of Erin shall we draw—the one, who has remained true to the old culture and the old traditions, and the other, it may be, who has wasted his substance in riotous thinking? They will never meet, praise to heaven: for unlike the knights of the story, they have realised that their respective sides of the shield are gold and silver. Indeed, Mr. Moore, to whom nothing is sacred in this world (and to Mr. Shaw there are few things sacred in the next), makes it an inviolable rule not to discuss 'his very good friend.' It is true, he once suggested—but no matter.

It is not to be wondered at that Mr. Moore, who has never hesitated to speak truthfully of himself, should seek to spare others. If he dislikes a contemporary, it is hardly necessary to explain that he says so. If in writing, it is said in so persuasive, so insinuating a way that one has to hold fast to one's opinions with a desperate effort of will. His criticisms are like anaesthesia; we never realise that we are going under until we are under. But in speech he is more explicit; the facts, the damning evidence, cannot be marshalled extemporarily. And his most damning phrase is simply, 'Oh, the man can't write.' 'Can't write,' accompanied with a shrug of the shoulders and an upward movement of the hands. The last rite one feels has been solemnised, the man is dead. And nowadays if one wishes to gain the ear of Mr. Moore one must write

well. New wine he will not have in new bottles, though, as with Balzac, he is prepared to extend his judgment to the old bottles. It is not surprising, then, if his standard of judgment is even a good way behind the standard he imposes on himself, that he will find little to interest him in current fiction. In his criticisms, with the exception of that of Mr. Kipling, he has committed himself little beyond the Victorians. His last onslaught was directed against Henry James. And his opinions on contemporaries for the most part have been limited to remarks at ill-chosen times and in ill-chosen places.[1]

Mr. Moore has said some hard things—harder than the bounds of criticism allow for—but at heart he never intended hurt. 'I don't like criticising people';

[1] Without a breach of confidence, I may add that Mr. Galsworthy has been unable to impress him, his work is 'so obviously written down'; Mr. Lawrence is 'a man of talent but unbalanced'; while for Conrad he has no appreciation at all, remarking that 'anyone might write this stuff about ships disappearing in a blue mist'. Concerning Mr. Chesterton he will not commit himself beyond the fact that he finds him amusing, and likes him, on the whole, better than his friend Mr. Belloc. On the other hand, Mr. Bennett's work, his earlier books in particular, he holds in esteem, particularly 'The Old Wives' Tale.'

Of international figures, D'Annunzio conveys nothing to him, and Maeterlinck very little more. 'All one need say about Maeterlinck,' he says, 'is that he invented a formula and worked it to death. A great artist has no need of a formula. It was very simple, and perhaps rather commonplace. And everyone understood it at once. That which the public understands at once—it may be very wonderful but the chances are that it is not. Burne-Jones, like Maeterlinck, invented a formula which everyone understood. And all were entranced until they became bored. Or Rossetti! What better example could we have, a man who intoxicated his own generation, and so bored the next that they could not bear to look at him?' To Anatole France he gives the questionable praise that he is a 'very perfect writer.'

These are all impromptu judgments which he would be prepared to extend and justify if need be, but they are sufficient to give a pointer to his thoughts.

these were his last words of the writer. 'It doesn't do me any good; it doesn't do them any good; it doesn't do anybody any good. What I have said about Hardy I have said—I don't suppose it did any good, but I simply'—(and the old antipathies flew up into his face like a flame)—'I simply could not see why people were referring to the man as a great writer, when he could not write at all.'

Time and the mellowing effects of age, and of a few months of illness, when one lives a lifetime, have straightened out some of the angularities of his thought, as they have softened, widened, and deepened the expressiveness of his face. It is the most kindly of men, a George Moore most strangely translated, one now finds in Ebury Street—kind enough, in all truth, to confound his enemies. His last letter to the writer, if proof were needed, runs: '. . . you must not think the word "kind" repeated twice is meant to express a perfunctory politeness; I use it to express a feeling that has been growing upon me for some time—that kindness outlives wit and sarcasm.'

To grow old must have its compensations, and such as they are Mr. Moore has discovered them. One is conscious of this when speaking to him. There is a knowledge the tongue cannot utter nor the mind ponder over—the knowledge that is written large on the face of one of Rembrandt's old men. And George Moore has no regrets. The inner knowledge which had escaped him through how many tempestuous years seems now to have descended on him, so that his presence alone is a kind of inspiration. Unlike so many

master builders, he is not afraid of the young men knocking at the door—Mr. Bennett, Mr. Shaw, Mr. John: how fortunate are the young men that their betters view them with rather more indulgence than they deserve. The young man in turn, may he not, with justification, approach Mr. Moore with some awe? Heaven help him if he bend the knee and utter 'Master,' if he speaks in a rather significant way about immortality. 'Oh, dear, no; I set no higher value on myself than a story-teller'—that will be the answer he will receive. But Mr. Moore's stipulation is not what he has done, and if he remind Mr. Moore how little it is, he will receive the kindly reply that no one does anything before thirty. He may have been reading a passage of Mr. Moore's, and in sheer despair renounced hope of words ever obeying him. Mr. Moore will add that one is more likely to write many good books than one good book, since in the art of writing, as in all other arts, one profits by experience. But the public: is one to disregard it, as Mr. Moore has done; and was it choice or accident, since he himself tells of his youthful desire for notoriety?

'*L'audace, et toujours de l'audace*,' he will answer, quoting Danton. 'It is true, I desired notoriety—but I knew when to stop!'

For the rest, one must write Mr. Moore down as a stoic who would have delighted the heart of Marcus Aurelius himself.

> I was ever a fighter, and so one *book* more,
> The best and the last.

May that not be a fitting epitaph?

Stoicism is not a faith, but it is the best substitute for one, and Mr. Moore has laid hold of it firmly. Death, or the fear of death, is never allowed to enter his thoughts. It is an incident and no more, and when it comes remonstrances are useless. Only once have I referred to the subject. He had given an interview in which he explained that after his last book was finished he would be ready for the doctors again.

'I am amazed at your stoicism, Mr. Moore,' I could not help remarking. 'Death seems to hold no terror at all for you.'

And his reply was a quiet smile. He was pleased. 'And why should it?' he said. 'I see no reason why I should ponder on it. There is really little to be said about it. If it came, it was just like the breaking of a cup or a glass. I can't say I would have had any regrets. At the time I felt sorry for "Aphrodite in Aulis"—*but that was all.*'

And now, last stage in this eventful history is Mr. Moore himself—Mr. Moore as I see him, passing like a ghost from room to room: for the ideal to which he has devoted his life remains in the face, and in the face perhaps the eyes, for they alone seem to have called up himself from the long, angular body. If one had his own power to draw a portrait, what a portrait it might be! 'I would emulate the veracity of Holbein,' he writes, in defending his own sketches, 'who followed an outline with such singleness of purpose that the souls of his sitters are afloat on his canvases.'

It is a tall man I see then—a tall man, with a clear,

fresh countenance, less that of an old man than that of a grown-up boy. His is a face one can always remember—long and lean, with fine, tired eyes; but the expressions which play upon it, transfiguring it as the play of sunlight on a lake, one remembers most of all. Courteous, kindly, even deferential as a listener; sometimes, as when chasing the threads of his own thought, a little impatient, a little exasperated; sometimes, as when really roused, a wave of his fine, white hands, and a grand torrent of eloquence, fire, dust, and ashes like a stream of lava. There is laughter, too, light-hearted laughter, which floods the room like light—a stray jest which has strayed out like a bubble and suddenly burst: the mild-eyed surprise at its reception, until suddenly, as though relinquishing all claims on propriety, the whole self joins issue.

See this tall, loose-limbed man in the doorway—held in a shaft of light, like some reincarnation of a chevalier—bidding adieu to his guest with a charm and courtesy all his own, wagging a remonstrative finger the while: 'Remember Wagner's "Ring"—hundreds of different subjects and yet they all hang together.'

A fine, expressive head it is—a certain faded shagginess is there, as though Manet's portrait of him had continued to age: and if we follow the sensitive lines of the face, we stop at the mouth and perhaps wonder why it has that setting, until we realise there is a part of Mr. Moore to which the mouth belongs. Nor is the mouth coarse, but the lips are too full, the upper lip overhangs the lower, the drooping moustache can never hide a certain fleshliness that is there. Twin

spirits there were at his birth, the fairy and the banshee, and they have written themselves plainly on his face. That is why he will never 'slip through the wicker gate of heaven and go gathering stars,' for the weight of life is too heavy on him: rather will he turn aside into one of Corot's meadows, and, as he would say, earth may show us nothing more beautiful 'than evanescent cloud and a nymph gathering summer blooms by the edge of a lake.'

And here is the Aubusson carpet and the Louis Quinze clock, and outside a stray taxi, like a fly, crawls down the waste place that is Ebury Street. But the curtains are drawn and the old world shut out, and though over the housetops the new world buzzes and reputations are being made and lost overnight, here all is quietness: the white-haired figure before us will presently sit down at the carved writing-desk to add a few more lines to his story of ancient Greece.

CHAPTER IV

Mr. Moore explains how he would have written the book. The art of story-telling. The Prosecution of the Innocents. What is an Irishman? He sums up his character. A literary Quixote?

'AND now,' said Mr. Moore on a certain evening, his hands spread out expansively before him, 'I will tell you how the book may be written. You must start with a statement—a statement of fact: just a simple, ordinary, blunt statement.'

'Quite,' I replied, with some hesitancy.

'A simple statement such as, "He caught the train at ten o'clock in the morning", or "He did not catch the train", as you please, and then continue; that is much better than moralising—moralising on what he might have done if he had, or had not, caught the train. Moralise if you like, but moralise around the facts and not at their expense.'

'True,' I replied again, and Mr. Moore continued:

'Of course, I don't know from what point you have begun. You may begin from any one of fifty points—it is as you please. But if you are writing the book as I imagine you will write it, you will confine yourself to simple, direct statement.'

I made a movement of protest and Mr. Moore broke off in his narrative—'Well?' he said.

'It is just this, if you will pardon me. We have already decided that character is all-important?'

'That is true.'

'Well, you realise my point of view when I say I am going all out after your character. There is enough scope, surely. All else—Moore Hall, Montmartre, everything must make way for character.'

'No, no, no—you are in error—in grave error. My dear young man, don't you see, character can only spring out of incident? There can be no character otherwise. But if you take the incidents in my life you can realise my character through them. Heaven knows, they are strange enough. I am to continue at school in the ordinary way. "No," I say, "I am off to Paris, I will be café-educated." Mark that, it is the first important incident. Then I return from France after ten years, with almost no knowledge of my own tongue, a stranger in a land I had forgotten.'

' "A magnificent young Montmartian," you have said, "with a blond beard *à la caporal*, trousers hanging wide over the foot, and a hat so small that my sister had mistaken it for her riding-hat." '

'Maybe I have forgotten and it is irrelevant. And then I say I will establish the aesthetic novel in English. I, who had almost forgotten English! I saw the niche that was to be mine and thought, if I could procure a ladder long enough, I could reach it. That is the second incident—entirely in accordance with the first. You see, as the incidents follow one another, the character, as you call it, will develop as a matter of course. And now there is the third incident. I hated the Boer War, of course. The idea of waging a war on a people who were Protestant as we, and who read their Bibles, was repugnant to me. And yet what did

I do but gather my things together and leave for a country where the Bible was held in abhorrence? I suddenly decided to go to Ireland! Why, on reflection, I hardly know; but I do know that I went, and when I arrived there and found the people were searching for a new literature, I decided to give them, since art is all imitation of some sort, a model for their purpose. I wrote a book called, called——'

'"The Untilled Field."'

'Yes—"The Untilled Field," containing some ten stories, one or two of which, I think, were quite good. And then somebody came up to me and said, "What do you know, what have you seen, of Ireland?" And I had to explain that, but for my earliest days and one or two occasional visits, I knew nothing. He suggested the only parallel was the deaf Beethoven writing music. Why do you laugh?'

'If you will excuse me, I think that, in the sense in which we have been discussing, that was really rich.'

'I don't know whether it was rich or not, but it certainly happened. Incident again, you see—there is no need to moralise from incidents. They do all the moralising that is necessary—but that is by the way. Now, have I made myself plain?'

'Perfectly—there remains the fact that in doing as you suggest I should only have to transcribe certain passages of your books. I hardly think I am likely to improve upon them.'

'Well, that is a matter for you. The writing of books will continue without end. But as I foresee it, you will have a clear-cut line of narrative, which you will be

able to follow to its logical conclusion. Now, then, we start——'

'Yes—but——'

'We should start,' continued Mr. Moore, not noticing the interruption, 'we should start with that certain young man who came over from Paris to found the aesthetic novel in English. Dickens there was in plenty, but what was Dickens, I thought, but something for human consumption or human use, something like a trunk; and then when the public were tired of low life, they would rush over to Thackeray and live with the dukes. However, these were my opinions —I might have been wrong—I cannot say. But the novel as an art form, as something with any pretensions to literature—that did not exist. However, I was saying——'

'That a young man came over to found the aesthetic novel and——'

'And found two great obstacles in his way. Did I mention that?'

'Not as yet.'

'Well, they are important, for had they succeeded and not I, we would still be talking of the aesthetic novel as of something as remote as the stars. The two organisations with which I was confronted may be named Smith and Mudie. And the first knowledge I had of Smith and Mudie were two big carts which were hauled about the streets. Inside the carts were books, no doubt, but what manner of books they were, I have no idea. I know that when my first novel appeared these two gentlemen protested. In "A Modern Lover," you

see, there was a divorce and I think one of the characters also had a mistress. Why the surprise?—do you doubt, as these two estimable gentlemen did, that people in this country occasionally find enjoyment elsewhere than in the home? But to continue: the trouble had begun, and so I was faced with a decision. I will break down this monopoly, I said; and it was I established the six-shilling novel, so that people who were inclined to reading, may read. Other books followed—"The Mummer's Wife" and finally "Esther Waters;" which was, as you must have heard, regarded in certain circles as the most pornographic of books. It is true that Mr. Gladstone spoke in its favour, but it is also true that it gave birth to the phrase the "pre-Raphaelite obscenities of George Moore." "The Brook Kerith" appeared, and I was faced with a libel action and then a revised version of my book. "A Modern Lover" came out under the title of "Lewis Seymour and Some Women," and there arose that wretched lawsuit of which you may have heard. But we need not go into that. It was a foolish idea, but the lawyers were given a chance to talk and, as they enjoy talking, the case went on and on. And no one knew what it was about. But stay!—we were to hear more. It appears there was a man with the name of the character I had chosen, and it also appears he was a mere boy when I wrote the book. The book, you must remember, must have been written thirty-seven years before and had been in circulation since!'

'And yet within a few years you were to be quoted

at great length by the defending counsel in another literary *cause célèbre*,' I replied.

'Was I?'

'Oh, yes—there was some question of deciding what is art or what is truth, or how far art approaches truth, or some such question which magistrates have to decide, and, as I have said, defending counsel fell back on you as the best authority.'

'I did not know. But to continue: Lord Darling's summing-up was an admirable piece of work. Had the verdict gone against me, there would have been no question, but an appeal for a much bigger question was involved. Had I lost, there would have been nothing left writers but to label their characters A, B, and C, and so on.'

'Or,' I added, 'as the late Nat Gould would do—name them after railway stations: Mr. John Clapham Junction, for example.'

'Nevertheless,' went on Mr. Moore, 'I was again faced with a decision. To protect myself, to escape this incessant trouble, I decided to publish my books at two guineas each. It has, by the way, had a very beneficial effect on book production.'

'Making possible,' I said, 'the many fine limited editions which is the only point of contact our world has with yours.'

'I like to think—in fact, I am certain—that the limited editions followed my example. However, that is beside the point. But now you have the whole story.'

'A great deal truly, but it is not enough. Though, as

you have been telling me your experiences, a title came to my mind.'

'And a title has suggested itself to me also, but I will reserve my suggestion awhile. Your title would be?' enquired Mr. Moore.

' "The Prosecution of the Innocents," ' I replied. Mr. Moore made no reply; and on second thoughts I believed the pun a bad one, so I continued—'but what you have explained is not you, though one must confess there is a strong strain of you running through it.'

'Yes, yes,' went on Mr. Moore, a little exasperated. 'I am trying to give you a clear line or the *motif*, shall we say, which you extend or amplify as you choose. The other details of my life fit on to this trunk as a matter of course. You say, for instance, that I was born somewhere or another at such and such a time —you can find that in a reference book—that I lived somewhere or another, and that as I was born and lived so . . .'

> With Fifteen-ninety or Sixteen-sixteen
> We end Cervantes, Marot, Nashe or Green;
> Then Sixteen-thirteen till two score and nine
> Is Crashaw's niche, that honey-lipped divine.
> And so, when all my little work is done,
> They'll say I came in Eighteen-seventy-one,
> And died in Dublin. . . . What year will they write
> For my poor passage to the stall of night?

'Who is that?' said Mr. Moore.

'Synge,' I replied. 'I am most anxious to find what you have said about him in "Hail and Farewell," for I imagine you have said something.'

'Yes, but my dear young man, what use confine ourselves to the story if you go wandering off to Synge and "Hail and Farewell"? What I think of Synge has really very little to do with my life. It can be summed up in a sentence or two. It may be interesting in itself, but it has nothing to do with the story, and it destroys, or seeks to lessen, the theme. You see that? A work of art depends for its effect, as does everything else, on its plan. When you agree on the plan, there is no other course open but to follow it and not go wandering off into side-avenues, moralisings, disquisitions, and heaven knows what. That seems to me to be the trouble of the present-day writers. If they have ever decided on what they were trying to write about, they seem to have forgotten it after the first chapter, and though occasionally they may remember it before the last, the chances are often that it will remain forgotten.'

'And so I begin with the fact that you are an Irishman,' I replied, 'but if you will forgive me, I can hardly reconcile the fact that you *are* an Irishman——'

'No more can I,' answered Mr. Moore, shaking his head.

'Because,' I continued, 'in the public mind the word Irishman when coupled with a writer is at once associated with mysticism. Just what mysticism may be, I can never quite understand——'

'And you would just as well never try,' broke in Mr. Moore.

'But you never see more than you write about—and never write about more than you see. But in other

important respects, as I see you, I think you certainly are Irish.'

'But I can never clearly see where the Anglo-Irish differ from the English,' broke in Mr. Moore. 'If I remember, the suggestion is that a family remains two hundred years in Ireland to become Irish, and in that case my family may claim to be Irish—but, as I have said, I can never understand these distinctions. All my early life was spent in Paris with French artists, who never, so far as I know, were aware of any difference in me. The actual fact is that the Normans conquered England and the English conquered Ireland, so how can you draw these subtle distinctions? Niggers and gorillas, yes; but in the case which we have been discussing, it is as foolish to make distinctions as to suggest the people of Pimlico here are vastly different from, let us say, the people of Battersea over the river. No, we will go instead to Paris, and find a young man mixing with and accepted by the great figures of the time, Monet, Manet, Degas, Zola, and others. Why they should have accepted me, I do not know—I had done nothing nor given any indications of doing anything.' Mr. Moore paused a minute and smiled, as though at his own thoughts. 'I cannot say why they accepted me, unless it were on trust.'

'As you do me,' I broke in, 'and that explains your repeated kindness to what is vulgarly called "the young idea."'

'However,' went on Mr. Moore, 'I have mentioned that Manet once said to me that no Englishman stood for as much as I in the life of the time. And then, as I

have explained, I suddenly came over to England, saw a vacant niche——'

'The aesthetic novel!'

'Yes, the aesthetic novel, and determined to find a ladder long enough to reach it. It has been a troubadourish or quixotic life, as I see it. The title I was thinking of, were it not so cheap, would have been "A Literary Quixote," or something of that sort.'

'I am extremely glad to know you think so, because, coming from incident to character, I can think of no one to whom you more clearly approximate than the immortal knight of La Mancha. You may remember that in that short thing I wrote recently I suggested you had, perhaps, tilted at windmills, and added that your own incapacity to see things with our own level-headed clearness was the distance between us. It was arrived at by an independent course of reasoning and I am glad to see that it is endorsed by the best of all authorities. At the same time, I wondered whether you would be annoyed——'

'Annoyed. Why so? We are what we are, and it is of no use remonstrating with the Creator for not having given us other characters.'

'Yes, but——'

'That is so, is it not?'

'It is indeed so, but it doesn't entirely do away with the fact that most eminent men—shall I say most men in the profession you adorn and I serve?—are anxious that posterity, and more particularly their own generation, see them as they imagine they ought to be seen.'

'That is as it may be—I don't know,' said Mr. Moore.

'Some men, it is true, as Hardy, had singularly colourless lives; others, like Balzac, were as entertaining in their lives as in their books,' I replied. 'But in my own mind I had, in thinking of you, called up Don Quixote and Peter.'

'Peter! No—that man was a fool. Paul thought so—everyone thought so. St. Paul himself, we will say, was an excellent example of the quixotic spirit; but St. Peter, were he like anyone, calls to mind Sancho Panza.'

'However,' went on Mr. Moore, and now the evening was spent and I gathered up my books in readiness, 'remember there are fifty ways of writing a book—any one of which may be suitable. The last thing I would do would be to say such and such is the *only* way! But as far as simple, direct statement goes, leaving out the disquisition on what I think of Synge, I have given you the gist of the story. You will not write it to-day, nor to-morrow, nor maybe for many days. One can never write of to-day to-day, nor perhaps to-morrow. It must be absorbed and turned over slowly in the mind, and then it will slowly evolve of itself, coming as it were from a distance. That, one may say, is the time of harvest.'

CHAPTER V

Mr. Moore finds actors and actresses charming people. He speaks disparagingly of grammarians, and goes on to describe a play of his as a 'Shakespeare emetic.' He thinks our national bard would die 'twenty thousand times over,' at the idiocy of the veneration he now undergoes.

AN American who walked down Ebury Street one day, stayed awhile at 121 to enquire of Mr. Moore whether he had anything to publish. And Mr. Moore, so he says, searched in a drawer and found a little play which he handed to the American; and the American, so says Mr. Moore, handed him £450. It was some time after, that we in England saw the play, and Mr. Moore himself was lying dangerously ill in a nursing-home. His friends feared for him, until they read an interview he gave at the time, in which he described his contemporaries as not worth speaking of—when they feared no more! And walking down to Ebury Street shortly afterwards, pondering over the rumour that he was back at work and engaged on his last book, I wondered also what he was thinking of the success of this little play. Outside the house I paused a moment: was he really back?—the familiar figure spread out before the fire in that topmost room—the workroom was it?—with its coloured wallpaper, its green-shaded lamp, a few loose leaves of manuscript lying about, a diminutive bookcase half-filled with Gosse's 'Father and Son.' So it had been—and yet much had happened in

the meantime. But when I had rung the bell, Clara's voice had a happier note than when I had called before —Clara is the housekeeper who defends Mr. Moore from the world—and a moment later a long, loose figure in a white suit—though it was eight o'clock—appeared on the stairs, and a familiar voice called me in.

And, the greetings over, I told Mr. Moore it was a pity he was not able to appreciate the fun his play had caused—since fun it had certainly been.

'And I wondered if you knew,' I added, 'that the Stage had set out to make it so great a success as a tribute to you.'

'Yes, it was very kind, very kind,' replied Mr. Moore, as though to himself.

'And,' I added, unable to restrain a mischievous imp, 'I wondered what you would think, because in a chapter called "Mummer Worship" you say "an actor is one who repeats a portion of a story invented by another," and you say several other——'

'No, no,' and Mr. Moore was awake at once, 'you mistake me all the same. I have never had a quarrel with an actor in my life. Every actor I have met has been a most intelligent and a most charming man. It is true that—but no matter.'

'Yes—you were about to say something?'

'It is true that I have never met one who might have written the plays of Shakespeare,' Mr. Moore added, 'but otherwise. . . . The profession, you know, wants literary plays—Miss Thorndike has told me so repeatedly—for actors and actresses find they are then allowed to act. But why call them literary plays?

—I mean plays of human nature, which is the writer's province. You have not read my little play—stay, I will find you a copy.'

'Please don't worry, I can procure one.'

'No—it is too expensive.'

'And while we are talking of your play, I think you should know that there was one eminent literary figure——'

'Eminent literary figure—what manner of man is he?'

'He is more easily recognised than explained. As I was saying, there was one eminent literary figure to whom Shakespeare was at least a reality, who was very much upset that you should have taken your joke on Shakespeare seriously. The joke he could forgive, but when in an interview the next day you follow it up by saying that according to research the Grammar School at Stratford—one of the pillars of the Shakespeare legend—never existed——'

'Ha, ha, ha! What else did he say?'

'No more concerning Shakespeare, but——'

'Well?'

'It was really a mere nothing.'

'How can you have a "mere nothing"?'

'That is the point I am coming to,' I replied. 'His suggestion was that your style—which is the one unassailable stand on which those who differ from you decide to agree, had been examined at length in "The . . ." and found to be ungrammatical or something of the sort.'

'H'm!' and Mr. Moore paused. 'No,' he said after a

while, 'I cannot agree with them there. I think, on reflection, my style is generally grammatical. It is, at least, as grammatical as most people's. But, oh, the grammars! Think of it, the whole of Greek literature was written before anyone knew what a verb or a noun might be. The grammarians come along and confiscate what the writer has already made. Someone has said my style is not grammatical, you say? That is as it may be. There is the story told of Schumann, who wrote to Mendelssohn to say that he and Clara were giving his piece with the A sharp. "The piece with the A sharp!" said Mendelssohn. "What piece with the A sharp?" The A sharp was there all right, but he had given no thought to it. It just happened. You can think it a bad style or a very good one—both views are admissible. But of one thing I am certain—it is my own. Everyone writes as well as he can. And yet in these days you hear this sort of thing: "If I could only find a style." Do they expect to find a style under the sofa? They might just as well go to the National Gallery and say, "If I can only find a style I will make pictures." But we have wandered away from the subject.'

'We were talking of your play, Mr. Moore, and of an interview you gave at the time, which many people misinterpreted.'

'Yes—think of it!' he replied quickly enough. 'I don't want to talk of my illness—I am sick and tired of the whole thing. I have been ill and now I am better, that is all one need say, really. And yet, think of it—I was more or less delirious at the time. What a queer

occasion to ask anyone to talk of Shakespeare, or anyone else. Why, one might say "he babbled o' green fields." But, first imagine, never in my life had I any real measure of public appreciation. Then I write a play spoofing Shakespeare and everyone says in chorus: How splendid, how beautiful, how nice! The public had hitherto eyed me askance or accepted me with reservation. Then the object of England's admiration spoofed—and behold!

'Of course,' Mr. Moore went on, 'there is a reason, and it is not far to seek. The public are tired, tired to death, of the name of Shakespeare. Every week there are columns and columns on whether there was a comma here or whether a sentence was run on there, whether he mentioned this town or that man. *The Times Literary Supplement* never fails, with letters and still more letters. Someone is always discovering something—there are forty-five volumes on the hats he wore (I don't know the exact number), and another twenty on the boots, and fifteen on the flowers he mentions—on and on, without any point or charm of any sort.

'Shakespeare himself would die twenty thousand times over at the idiocy of it. And the public have been drinking, drinking of this beverage brewed by the pundits, until they were sick. They couldn't bear it any longer. My little play acted as an emetic. They said in effect, "Thank God, there's some doubt about it!" and had a good laugh.'

I laughed so heartily at Mr. Moore's description that he raised a hand gently calling on me to desist. As

we were going down to the drawing-room, where is kept a wine with which Mr. Moore regales his guests before their departure, another question had occurred to me; and the stairs being most favourable for provocative questions, for the mind is loosened as it were, I determined to begin.

CHAPTER VI

Mr. Moore disposes of the idea that an artist's life is sacred, and is led on to defining what is, or rather what is not, plagiarism. He speaks of what he and Anatole France have in common. His great fault, he says, was his frivolity. He composes his own epitaph and ends with some remarks on inspiration.

'MR. MOORE,' I began on the second landing, 'there is an outcry about Dickens——'

'It is of no importance,' he replied, a note of finality in his voice.

'Dickens lovers apparently——' I added.

'Dickens lovers! What are Dickens lovers?' There was a pause, and we traversed some steps in silence. The opportunity, I felt, had gone for ever.

'There may be,' came the reply, 'there may be George Moore lovers, but I still fail to see what it means.'

'And yet,' I said, 'a broader question arises—to what extent is an artist's life sacred?'

'To what extent is anyone's life sacred?' he began. 'My reply would be: "Does he (the biographer) write a good or a bad book?" It is a pure case of justification by works. It is like plagiarism. Taking something from one man and making it worse is plagiarism. But taking something from one man and making it better—what is that? Certainly not plagiarism.

'Take the case of Anatole France, a second-rate writer of great charm, great culture, but whom no one

would consider a very great man. Brousson, his secretary, has written his biography, a book composed with the most singular skill; one conversation fits in with another into a most harmonious whole. In fact, though I did not like to suggest this to Brousson when we last met, Anatole France might have helped him with it.

'France's great fault—let us stick to France for a moment—is his frivolity. In his most seriously written works he is always at it, and he ends up by being wearisome and rather silly. Even in the first volume of what is in some ways the magnificent "Jeanne d'Arc" —not as good as Renan, because it is too good—he is always poking fun at miracles. And then in "Thais," to live under a rock in a climate in which one of our summer days is exaggerated a hundred-fold is not a matter for fun. To give up this life for another may be wise or foolish, but it is certainly not a joke. It is like laughing at a man smashed up in a motor accident. And then, somewhere, the angels going to cafés and catching fleas in their wings—I don't know if he put it that way, but he might have—is merely stupid.

'France's one virtue, apparently, was his corrections. All that is valuable in any work comes in the corrections, and apparently with France it was the same.

'Should I ever have a tombstone, I should like this written on it—let us phrase it correctly,' and there was a pause:

'HERE LIES GEORGE MOORE, WHO LOOKED UPON CORRECTIONS AS THE ONE MORALITY.

'But to return: Brousson told me of France's peculiar way of writing an article. He would ask him to

do it, correct it in manuscript and again many times in proof. After three corrections it was some Brousson but more France, but by the tenth it was pure France.'

'A noble idea, truly,' I broke in, 'but it doesn't leave much room for inspiration. When one reads David or Isaiah one feels that the words are struck off red-hot, and that corrections could but mean a process of cooling.'

'But I suggest,' said Mr. Moore, 'that some people's inspiration comes in the corrections. And one may speak of inspired writing, but remember Dowden's publication of the first draft of Shelley's "Epipsychidion." Here was the first draft of the most inspired poem in the language—flat! But in the second version every page, every sentence, every epithet is inspiration.'

CHAPTER VII

Mr. Moore discovers the stupid blunder in 'Macbeth.' The scene that Shakespeare never wrote. 'Poetry by the yard.' He decides that here, hidden away in the great tragedy, is the first authentic 'talkie.'

THE tall figure coming through St. James's Park seemed at the distance like Mr. Moore, did I not know that he kept earlier hours and was not given over-much to walking. The same park that he could himself so well describe, an oasis in the thing that was London: for the roar of traffic to the north and south came in on the night like the confused murmur of the sea, while up and down the Mall the taxis flicked like fireflies. But here was peace, a moment's meditation on the bridge with the lake nestling beneath, its starkness spiked and shattered by the Palace lights.

'Why, it *is* Mr. Moore!'

His head was down, eyes fixed on the ground, head sunk forward on his chest as though deep in thought. Stopping, he looked over the house-tops a moment, his lips moving as though with speech. Then, recollecting himself, he awoke as though out of a reverie.

'How many murderers, say you, are there in "Macbeth"?'

'Three,' I replied in haste. 'At least, unless Macbeth——'

'Quite: unless Macbeth was the fourth, you would

say. It has been said before, it will be said again, and as Macbeth himself cannot contradict it, it doesn't really matter. Nevertheless, there are three murderers, and yet I undertake to find a fourth.' There was a twinkle in Mr. Moore's eye. His humour is at all times contagious.

'There is some devilry afoot,' I broke in.

'There is no devilry, but there is a devil.'

'The devil!'

'The first authentic devil, perhaps.'

'But you suggest . . . ?'

'I suggest nothing. I say that I have found the fourth murderer. Also, that this fourth murderer was a devil. The other three murdered Banquo; this man finished, or sought to finish, "Macbeth." And this man was most of all one whom the vile blows and buffets of the world had so incensed that, it seems, he was reckless what he did to spite the world.'

'I still fail to understand,' I said in bewilderment.

'The other three were hirelings; this man was a hack,' Mr. Moore continued, as though enjoying the prospect. 'Now, if a hack only hacked, there would have been less of "Macbeth," which might have been a calamity; but as it is, there is more, which is also a calamity, or was to me during the past two hours.' I knew that an explanation would come and so I was content to wait, while Mr. Moore, gathering up his thoughts, continued: 'I have been to see "Macbeth," always a temptation, and with Miss Sybil Thorndike as Lady Macbeth, a temptation to which one must yield. But I did not stay until the end. The simple fact

was that I could not endure a play with thirty-two curtains. As I sat there, it suddenly occurred to me that something was wrong, that the play as it is written could never hope to be properly acted. No play, of course, can stand thirty-two curtains. Having once decided that something was wrong, I decided to find what *was* wrong, and now I believe I have found it.'

'Shakespeare——'

'No, Shakespeare has nothing to do with it. He would be as interested as I am in tracing this hired assassin.'

'Hired assassin!'

'Yes! The fourth murderer. I undertake to prove to you that the play "Macbeth" has been murdered; that a stupid blunder has been committed; that a spurious piece has been interpolated; that it should never be there, and being there, should not be allowed to remain. By the time you call, I shall have gathered together what evidence I think necessary, and I believe you will see, as I do, that——'

'Someone has blundered.'

'Precisely.'

It was several weeks before I met Mr. Moore again and in the meantime I had read through "Macbeth," without, however, much profit. I could not forget the conversation of that night, and in Ebury Street reminded Mr. Moore of his promise, almost before I was through the door.

MOORE: You have read through 'Macbeth'?

MYSELF: I have.

MOORE: To no purpose?

MYSELF: To no purpose.

MOORE: That is a pity. If you had only looked a little more closely. If, coming to Act III., Scene 3, you had paused for a moment and given Shakespeare the credit of being, firstly, a dramatist who wrote for the theatre, and, secondly, a poet who wrote poetry, you would then have found something. However, I will lead you to where Shakespeare ends and the hack begins. The murder, you must understand, has been committed. It has been committed 'off,' far more effectively than it could ever have been committed 'on.' This is as Shakespeare planned it. He knew, as Victor Hugo knew long afterwards, that the deed committed behind closed doors is far more effective theatrically than the deed committed, shall we say, with the doors wide open. Shakespeare's hand is obvious up to the end of Scene 2. A dramatist, and therefore a master in the effective device of conveying an emotion to the audience, there was no reason why he should have suddenly rushed three bloody villains on to the stage to do again what they had already done—as well as it ever can be done. The only explanation, as I suggest, is that Shakespeare, having written the act according to his conscience—and his conscience, however pliable it may have been, would not have allowed this grave error—was superseded by some hack who was told to give the public a mixture of the mud and blood of melodrama. My first reason, as I say, for supposing that this piece is a spurious interpolation is that it is dramatically ineffective.

MYSELF: But Shakespeare was subject to lapses, even in his construction.

MOORE: Lapses—when and how? This is not a lapse but a blunder. A looseness in construction at times I might grant, but this is not looseness in construction. This means the going back on everything that went before; or, if you would prefer it this way, there are obviously two minds at work: the first mind, that had already achieved unity, and the second mind, which, it seems, was determined to destroy it. But I see you are not convinced, and now for the final test. Read through Scene 2. Macbeth is speaking. Begin:

> There's comfort yet; they are assailable;
> Then be thou jocund. Ere the bat hath flown
> His cloister'd flight, ere to black Hecate's summons
> The shard-borne beetle with his drowsy hums
> Hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done
> A deed of dreadful note.

MOORE: Pure Shakespeare, is it not? Just think, just listen (and his expressive hands raised, his own rich voice called up in all its intensity, he repeated):

> The shard-borne beetle with his drowsy hums
> Hath rung night's yawning peal.

Isn't that enough?

> There shall be done a deed of dreadful note.

Here we may say is the authentic ring. But continue.

> *Lady M.* What's to be done?
> *Macb.* Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,
> Till thou applaud the deed. Come, seeling night,
> Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day,
> And with thy bloody and invisible hand
> Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond
> Which keeps me pale! Light thickens, and the crow
> Makes wing to the rooky wood;

Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,
Whiles night's black agents to their preys do rouse.
Thou marvell'st at my words: but hold thee still;
Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill.
So, prithee, go with me.

MOORE: And now, read out Scene 3. Here it is:

THE SAME. *A Park, with a Road leading to the Palace. Enter three Murderers.*

First Mur. But who did bid thee join with us?
Third Mur. Macbeth.
Second Mur. He needs not our mistrust, since he delivers
Our offices and what we have to do
To the direction just.
First Mur. Then stand with us.
The west yet glimmers with some streaks of day:
Now spurs the lated traveller apace
To gain the timely inn: and near approaches
The subject of our watch.

MOORE: Hold, hold! That is enough, surely.

MYSELF: Why? You cannot judge a poet on this staccato, thrust-and-parry dialogue.

MOORE: But wait. Had this man confined himself to the staccato dialogue, as you call it, he might have carried it off; but the temptation is too strong, and he is in good company. He has tried to soar off into poetry; the chicken seeing the eagle aloft, flaps his wings.

MYSELF: I don't know. 'The west yet glimmers with some streaks of day'—that is not bad.

MOORE: Come, come, my dear young man.

MYSELF: Well, perhaps, on second thoughts——

MOORE: Precisely. It is the sort of stuff, however, which is intended for first thoughts. 'Then stand with us. The west yet glimmers with some streaks of day':

what does that remind you of? 'Some streaks.'

MYSELF: Raw bacon, perhaps.

MOORE: True. Just consider, 'some streaks.' It is like the story of Wordsworth and Scott. He could never understand 'swan and the lake.' 'Why not,' he said, 'have some swans?' But here speaks the poetaster—poetry by the yard. It is like incidental music at a theatre. It is how I might write it——

MYSELF: Indeed, no, I am quite certain that George Moore——

MOORE: . . . how you might write it, how the man down the street would write it; but certainly not as Shakespeare would have written it. But continue:

Third Mur. Hark! I hear horses.
Ban. (*Within*) Give us a light there, ho!
Second Mur. Then 'tis he: the rest
That are within the note of expectation
Already are i' the court.

MOORE: The note of exclamation?

MYSELF: The note of expectation.

MOORE: Ah! Profound.

First Mur. His horses go about.
Third Mur. Almost a mile: but he does usually,
So all men do, from hence to the palace gate
Make it their walk.

MOORE: What is that about?

Second Mur. A light, a light!
Enter Banquo, and Fleance with a torch.
Third Mur. 'Tis he.
First Mur. Stand to't.
Ban. It will be rain to-night.
First Mur. Let it come down.

MOORE: Bravo!

(*They set upon Banquo.*)

Ban. O, treachery! Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly!
Thou may'st revenge. O slave!

(*Dies. Fleance escapes.*)

Third Mur. Who did strike out the light?
First Mur. Was't not the way?
Third Mur. There's but one down; the son is fled.
Second Mur. We have lost best half of our affair.
First Mur. Well, let's away, and say how much is done.

(*Exeunt.*)

MOORE: Enough, in all faith. And now that that gentleman has finished, you may return to Shakespeare.

Macb. See, they encounter thee with their hearts' thanks.

'Hearts' thanks'—there speaks the authentic voice again. 'Be large in mirth'—that is the poet. And now on again:

As broad and general as the casing air:
But now I am cabin'd, cribb'd, confined, bound in
To saucy doubts and fears.

But that is enough surely. Now we are on safe ground again. But if you can explain firstly why, and secondly how, Shakespeare wrote that third Scene, you are a far cleverer man than I. I have it. This scene, you will agree, cannot possibly be regarded as drama. Yet it is action linked with a certain amount of noise. That the action is unimportant and the noise meaningless. . . . I have it. Here we have discovered—what?

MYSELF: I have no idea.

MOORE: We have discovered the first authentic 'talkie.'

CHAPTER VIII

Mr. Moore discusses woman's contribution to the fine arts, likens genius to apples, and quotes the case of Wagner to prove that there is no one way to Parnassus.

THERE was a hardly distinguishable rustle in the mulberry tree, but one could hear the crisp leaves falling, and as I closed the door I thought there was to be a change in the weather. And as I stood and watched the massive trunk bound and splintered like an old warrior—the patriarchal arms, perforce, propped up like Abraham's, it filled me with misgivings, so that for once I wished it were possible to invoke not the ghost of Sir Thomas More (whose garden it was) but of John Knox. It had so happened that a young man who holds Central Europe together by a web of cables had returned from Vienna with tidings of an interview given him by a venerable figure who had spent the best part of his life in the past and had now taken refuge in the future. The man's name I forget, but he was one of the best of the modern prophets; and as a sociologist had no equal—his words were such that one accepted them without question, not knowing why, but certain that they must be true. And at mention of 'sex equality' one must imagine him laughing quietly and the journalist's pencil poised in the act of stabbing a notebook. 'Sex equality,' he repeated, 'but it is not a question of sex equality. Why, emancipated woman . . .'

And the journalist with a few deft touches gave me part of his exclusive vision. A well-regulated, soulless world system, and woman triumphant. 'But Nature?' I said. 'Go to the bee, thou poet,' he replied, quoting Mr. Shaw. 'God, yes,' I said: 'you mean the world will be a bee-hive—and then the Queen Bee.' And as I watched his retreating figure I remembered what Mr. Lawrence had said about a 'silk-stockinged horde' and a matriarchy, and thought I would go to Ebury Street. A dog-eared copy of Schopenhauer, bitten through with worms, was to be my excuse. But what the worms had left was enough in all faith, I thought. One had to be for or against in such an onslaught. And with the precious volume under my arm, fearing each moment it might come to pieces, I was announced by Clara. And Mr. Moore saw first the volume under my arm and, fearful of such things, enquired after it. 'Schopenhauer,' I said. 'The German?' 'One of the greatest philosophers that ever lived,' I answered. 'Dear me!' said Mr. Moore, and my discomfiture was partly for one of the greatest philosophers that ever lived; for I felt the irony was directed at him more than at my enthusiasm, though Mr. Moore will enquire into enthusiasms. So many people have carried their enthusiasms to him, and perhaps carried them away again a little steadier for his examination. It was a bad beginning. And I began to read falteringly:

> Neither for music, nor for poetry, nor for fine art have they really and truly any sense or susceptibility; it is mere mocking if they make a pretence of it in order to assist their endeavour to please.

'That seems to me quite meaningless,' said Mr. Moore. 'What does he mean? or I did not gather your meaning.'

'He says,' I replied, 'that "women are thoroughgoing Philistines and quite incurable." '

'Ah, well,' replied Mr. Moore, 'these discussions on matters of sex equality or sex inequality—have it as you will—really fail to settle anything. However, there you are. I can only say that it is quite obvious that no woman will ever give us a "Ring," as it is quite obvious no woman will ever do a fresco like Michael Angelo. A far more important question than what women will contribute to the fine arts is this—what will the world contribute? For, my young friend, the age of art is over. People are not interested, that is all there is to say. Rather is one to say people are interested in mechanism and marvels, and to mechanism and marvels will they contribute henceforth, yes, and even for evermore. The Stone Age passed away—now it is nothing but a memory, and so is the age of art, not so distant, but fast vanishing from the view. The cleavage is complete. Search over the world and you find schools of art springing to life. Everybody is giving money to causes for the "advancement" of art, everyone will foster talent, all seek to preserve the artist and —nobody can draw a nose! We establish reviews in order to discover literary genius. Does no one know, or has everyone forgotten, that genius discovers itself? You don't trouble about it. Genius can be likened unto apples. This year you complain that the apples are not as red as they should be; maybe they are too red, or

maybe they are too plentiful, but small. But the apples go on just the same. They alone are unconcerned as to what the world says or thinks of them. Then come the seven years of plenty; yes, but then come, too, the seven years of dearth. But in the years of plenty or in the years of famine one must know that the apples will survive—that the trees will go on bearing fruit, big or small, red or green, plentiful or few. But to return to women. If there is one thing certain, if Nature has ever betrayed the secret on which she works towards her own distant end, it is just this—that woman, were she intended for anything, was meant, not for works of art, but for children. They may—and they do—sometimes produce poems, sometimes paint pictures, which are very nice. If we, men and women, would only realise the differences that divide us—if women would themselves only realise that they are different from men. They have not the brains of a man—not the same type of brain—and surely we may be glad that it is so, or life would be unbearable. When we meet a woman, when we speak to a woman, we employ an entirely different mode of address, an entirely different kind of conversation. Who may not say woman's calling is the relaxation of the warrior when he goes out—and returns—from conquering?'

'And yet, Mr. Moore, to go back. That genius always finds itself—how do we know? "That man is a genius," we say, and look and examine and find, as we must find, that he found himself. But the next man, he, too, is a genius who never found himself, and we write him down a failure. Cimabue finds a shepherd scratch-

ing on a slate, and the shepherd is to find himself to become Giotto. But had Cimabue not gone that summer to the hills—the shepherd would have remained, but where Giotto? That is why one remembers Gray's line on the mute inglorious Miltons.'

'But, my dear young man, were they Miltons how be mute and how inglorious? We have spoken of young artists, and I suggest the more you try and do for them the less good they are. That is the basis of my objections to education which is no more, I say, than a kind of asphyxiation which destroys the mind. No schoolmaster can know what a boy is fitted to do. The grain is implanted, perhaps, by his great-great-grandfather. It will flower not to-day, nor to-morrow, for it may lie latent in the ground for thirty years. As I think now my only talent—and I suppose I must have had one talent—was a determination not to be taught; and every day of my life I give praise that that one should have remained. It is extraordinary how stupid people are—and yet, in face of it all the old world seems to move along.'

'I was thinking—thinking of whether a young man at the time of, or before, The Confessions, was so sure that what was in him would find an outlet. Did he feel destined to . . .'

'No,' replied Mr. Moore; 'of that I am sure. I just took life as would a man thrown into a stream and forced to swim. Then I had no knowledge of the bank I should reach, neither did I know whether it might be an island or a rock. Beyond the fact that I left France to found the aesthetic novel in English, I cannot say

that I even had a definite objective. Said I to myself, "As no one in England seems prepared to write it, you had better try." In things of that sort you either do it or you don't. Literature has no such thing as a "successful line"; we look in vain for a "Beecham's Pill." Everyone thinks he has found the one way to Parnassus. But there is no one-way. Everyone must go as far as he can in his own way. Let us consider the case of Wagner. Wagner has not had, and will not have, successors. And yet a number of people jumped at the very obvious fact that he composed his own librettos and wrote very good music. "Therefore," they say, "I will go and do likewise." It was a trick, you see. And the result was that the libretto was wretched and the music worse. I have heard them, many of them, talking. Say they, "Ah, but we have the secret. All must come out of one's own inside." I replied—ineffectually it may have been—that there are many ugly things in one's inside, that Wagner wrote his librettos because he happened to be a very good poet, that he wrote his music because he was a profound, no, the greatest, of harmonists. But they would not listen. Now I am wandering. As I have said, I came over from France determined to revolutionise the English novel.'

'And may I suggest,' I said, 'that you must have had some faith in yourself to have attempted that?'

'I just wished to do it,' Mr. Moore answered, 'and do it I would, said I. I had no knowledge of how far I would get. I always did believe that I could write stories, and at a time when the most people were doing was a kind of paraphrasing of Boccaccio, I had more

faith in that capacity than ever. In the stories themselves I knew I should have no difficulty—though, in recompense, I have found plenty of other difficulties since. And so I came with "A Modern Lover" or "Louis Seymour and Some Women," as it is now called. But that is a long story. We began by discussing women—no, not discussing them, for you remember I told you once that one may as soon hope to define tragedy. And now we will have some tea and then we will begin where we now leave, for the most important thing to aim at is unity. Everything depends upon unity. Remember Wagner's "Ring"—hundreds of different subjects, and yet they all hang together. Where is Clara, I wonder?'

CHAPTER IX

Mr. Moore speaks of the challenging glove which he threw down, of his early struggles, and ends with some remarks on our commercial novelists.

CLARA had carried away the tea-things, and as I watched her and her careful, almost motherly, attention to the great writer, whose every need she anticipated, I was almost led to asking Mr. Moore why he had never been tempted to mention her, when he began. And where were we. . . . And remembering Wagner's 'Ring' I answered promptly enough that we had at last arrived at 'Louis Seymour and Some Women,' and a long story which was promised.

'Ah, yes, and that story begins with a young man who had come over from France to revolutionise the English novel. I could think of nothing else. And, as I think now, I did it in some ways better than other people, or, if you like, I produced a great deal of copy. . . . However, with my second book came reasons for not suppressing the first. No man began by writing as good a novel as "The Mummer's Wife"—it may not be a masterpiece, but it was certainly a masterpiece at the time—and it was then I realised one must have a stepping-stone, as it were, a *marchepied*, as the French say, and so I let the first book stand. And now the glove had been thrown down—a challenging glove—and it was at once seized upon by everyone whose

function it is to do these things. My life became one long warfare with the libraries, and so it was to come about that my work was to be done in defiance of the times.'

'And Schopenhauer says,' said I, opening the book on my knee and reading a passage I had only that morning marked:

> The man who seeks to do what is good and genuine, must avoid what is bad, and be ready to defy the opinions of the mob, nay, even to despise it and its misleaders.

Mr. Moore, who does not like Schopenhauer, had sunk back into himself, and his eyes sought the ceiling.

> Hence the truth of the remark (especially insisted upon by Osorius *de Gloria*) that—

I felt the worst was over and raised my voice purposely—

> that fame shuns those who seek it, and seeks those who shun it; for the one adapt themselves to the taste of their contemporaries, and the others work in defiance of it.

And it had the desired effect, for Mr. Moore was back again, and with his old fire took up the conversation.

'And now the majority of modern novels. There you find a preoccupation with the single thought of making money. Examine them yourself. Everything is left out that would annoy the reader: everything put in to flatter him. More, we can well picture the modern novel as a kind of vase or, shall we say, pot, in shape and size already circumscribed. And along come the people with their thoughts and characters and originality and tip them all in to have them moulded to the

pattern which custom or the public, or whoever it is, decrees. And, tell me, do you think such conditions make for a work of art? I can well believe that it makes for a circulation. But look around—in music, in literature and art—and you will find it is the same—ninety per cent write to the taste of the generation. The melodies of Verdi are to the taste of 1860, as the melodies of Gounod are to the taste of 1870. And to go back to the parable of the pot, consider some of the modern novelists and ask yourself do they pour into it or do they not. And yet here and there you will find a man who does not conform to the taste of the generation, but rather works in defiance of it. And so when I was faced with the problem I realised—as I have always realised—that one of the first necessities of the artist is that he should remain free.'

'And yet one must keep the pot boiling.'

'With pot-boilers?'

We laughed, but it was an unquiet thought.

CHAPTER X

Mr. Moore makes some references to Mr. Kipling and to an article he had written on Mr. Kipling's method, contrasting that writer's evenings with those of Pierre Loti. But the conversation drifts to Tchekov, whom Mr. Moore likes.

IN the row of thin flats music played at one end is heard at the other, and that is why the paper Tchekov had fluttered to the carpet like a shot bird and while the smoke rings ascended the thoughts had gone aloft with Mozart. It was a dreamy hour, and the full moon had come up slowly into the pale brightness of the first frost which had, it seemed, transfigured Heaven no less than Earth. And as I watched it splinter in the mulberry tree, dripping through its tiny latticed branches, I thought this was the first evening of the year. And who is there, I thought, who can describe evening, for to describe evening one must feel evening. One can describe a pot or a house or a room in one way or another, for we observe, but what observe of evening more than that the sky is hard and frosty or red or grey, that there is a moon or there is no moon? . . . With evening we have left the earth, and then I thought of Pierre Loti and wondered at his evenings—the grey, wistful Breton evening, sombre and vague and mournful with strange silences, or his Eastern evenings splashed with colour. And yet they were never gaudy, for all the gimcracks and tawdriness of the day

had fallen away in the lost land of night, and what he had given us had been—evening. The Mozart had stopped, and now are heard the trams again, running over the points, and the ticking of the clock, and the low, confused hum of King's Road, and I picked up Tchekov and came to the young writer's speech in 'The Seagull.' . . .

> . . . the description of the moonlight is long and overdone. Trigorin has worked out a system for himself; it's easy for him. He gives you the neck of a broken bottle lying by the mill and shining in the moonlight, and the dark shadows under the water-wheel, and there's your moonlight night complete, while I've got to talk about the quivering light, and the twinkling stars, and the distant sound of a piano growing faint in the still and perfumed air. . . . It's beastly. (A pause.) Yes, I can't help coming nearer and nearer to the conclusion that it isn't a question of old forms or new, but what the man writes, not bothering himself about forms, because it flows freely from his soul.

And I thought of the whole world of Tchekov which began and ended nowhere, and I could picture him writing a story on the back of a prescription in a fever hospital or in the waiting-room of a railway station, because it seemed he never bothered about forms, but surely wrote from his soul if any man did.

And Mr. Moore, who had said so much about Tourgenieff, had said nothing about his younger countryman who had carried the master's own tradition beyond him. And why not? And with 'Avowals' under my arm and the paper Tchekov in my pocket, I went down to Ebury Street.

And having arrived I mentioned as a preliminary the

book I had under my arm and the pleasure it had given me. And Mr. Moore asked had I read the article on Kipling and Loti, and on my replying no, wondered how I could have read the book. But at the mention of Mr. Kipling I was attentive enough, but Mr. Moore merely remarked he had written an article comparing a description of evening by each writer.

'Of evening?'

'Yes, and why not? I say that Kipling always seems to be spying on the evening, as it were. He goes down at night wondering how much evening he will see, and sees first the light on the bullock's horns or whatever it may be. And then he may see a man lighting his pipe in the dusk—and that is another piece of evening.'

I mentioned that great as was my admiration for Mr. Kipling he often seemed to me to have gone down to the evening with a note-book. But Mr. Moore replied that it was no use repeating what he had already said, particularly as he wrote better than he talked, and since I had the book on my knee, I might read the article if I chose while he would search for another book he would lend me.

And while Mr. Moore was searching for the book I began to read the article, noticing in particular Mr. Moore's play on a phrase of one of the Kipling characters, 'I know a trick worth two of that'—brought up with deadening insistence; and I remembered wishing I knew a trick worth two of that, for to read an article is not the same as to hear it spoken.

And as I read I patiently underlined as I went—

. . . —by creative artist is meant one who is able through sympathy to imagine men and women living in ideas and emotions alien to him.

He knew what the journalist was through himself, for there is a good deal of the journalist in Mr. Kipling. . . .

We are not aware of any other attempt of Mr. Kipling in imaginative representation of men and women, and the knowledge of his limitation is the sure sign of the artist. But who else, except Whitman, has written with the whole language since the Elizabethans?

He writes with the eye that appreciates all that the eye can see, but of the heart he knows nothing, for the heart cannot be observed.

Mr. Moore has come into the room again.

'Well, and what do you think?' he said.

'I think,' I replied, 'that Mr. Moore would not have said "important coughings," though coughings can be important,' and went on to read:

On looking into 'Kim' again I found pages of dialogue, magnificently wrought, hard and breathless; a hardware shop with iron tulips hanging from the rafters and brass forget-me-nots on the counter;

and added that, if it were possible to describe a writer in a sentence, this sentence surely held Mr. Kipling.

'I would not like to put so high a value on myself,' replied Mr. Moore. And now for Loti, I thought, and went on to read:

Loti's intention was to describe something that is eternal in the heart of man, something that he has known always, that he knew ten thousand years before Nineveh, and that he will know ten thousand years hence.

'I am glad you like Loti,' I said, 'and I cannot un-

derstand why Zola should tell you he had no humanity in him. His are small people and they are almost afraid to live. But the first man was not the first ape, for when they came over the brow of the hill and saw the sun the man's rough hands went up in an unconscious impulse and the ape blinked his eyes. I only suggest the measure of man's humanity is the Infinite. And Loti's description . . .'

'It is very pretty but very thin,' Mr. Moore replied. 'It is a sort of veil—and it gets thinner as it goes on. "Pêcheur d'Islande" is very nice, though "Roman d'un Spahi" is a better book. But the man had a very limited vocabulary so what could he do?'

'And yet the prophets were men of few words.'

'Yes,' replied Mr. Moore, 'but that is different—affirmations, continual affirmations. When one says the same thing over again many times a few words will suffice. But I find Loti very tiresome—words continually cropping up, *étrange*, *étrange*, *mystérieuse*, *mystérieuse*, and so on.'

There was a moment's silence. I could not let Loti go so easily, nor could I withstand Mr. Moore's onslaught. *Mystérieuse*, *mystérieuse*, and there was no meeting those expressive hands raised in an attitude of mock adoration, the inflection of the voice, the cheerful roguishness, that lurked behind the sudden seriousness of his face. And so I merely remarked that Loti was thin and so was twilight, and that the *viola d' amore* had not the range of an organ. And so I took from my pocket the paper-backed Tchekov and said that I had expected some reference to him

since so much had been written about Tourgenieff.

'One can think of him as a master of the short story,' I added, 'but one can remember his world besides. That wonderful objective quality of his . . .'

'Yes,' replied Mr. Moore, 'I like Tchekov, and the reason I did not mention him in "Avowals" was that at that time I had not read him. I have done so since—at least a large part. There is a story called, I think, "The Steppes," which is exquisite, and there is a great deal in him most admirable. But I will tell you what I really think—but this room is very cold. Do you find it so? We will have a glass of wine, and continue the conversation in the study.'

CHAPTER XI

Mr. Moore thinks Tchekov a water-colourist and speaks of the tale he would like to have written. He dislikes the majority of modern books which deal with artists or journalists and wishes someone would write about ordinary people.

AND seated in the arm-chair, hands crossed, radiant one might say, with a quiet happiness while the roaring fire burnished the long line of his face, Mr. Moore began again.

'We were talking of Tchekov, were we not? He always gives me the impression of being a man who does something else—as indeed he was, for he was a doctor, I believe. He wrote with genius, but I can never forget this something else. Remember, I don't apply the term amateur to him. Whatever he was he was certainly not that. In the short story, for example, he was better than Maupassant—who was a beastly writer—but, if you understand, he painted in water-colours and not oils. His work has, indeed, all along that certain beautiful bloom which oils cannot give. A certain lightness about it—rather casual. One may say that he wrote about all things with a very pretty touch. I remember a story of Tchekov's which I would very much have liked to rewrite. I had only read a synopsis of it, mind you. Had I read the complete story I would probably have changed my mind. But here it is, it is merely this. A man sits down in a restaurant. He is there for some little time and a woman comes in (she may have been

there first, I don't remember). He is in an excited state of mind—as every Russian apparently is except in Tourgenieff's novels,—and somehow or another he begins to tell her the story of his life—a subject which would suit me very well. He pours out all his heart—his troubles, sorrows and hopes, his misfortunes in love. . . . The woman goes upstairs to bed. He sits there wondering about her, how kind she has been, how sympathetic. He grows hot and cold in turns. Here at last is the woman he had always sought—the woman the very look of whose kind dear eyes was balm to his tortured heart. He resolves that he would marry her. The next morning he goes to seek her out—but she has left. "Good God," he says in effect, "if I had only told her the other story." There is a little bit of George Moore in that—but it can't be helped. He might have said something else. I don't think he said, "My reticence is my ruin," or anything like that—he was too great an artist. Anyhow that's the story. Now that to me is a water-colour. Call him—whom shall we call him? I will tell you, who was that Dutchman who is supposed to have started the Impressionists? Dear, dear, I've forgotten his name.'

'I think of Brabazon,' I said.

'Brabazon, no. Never mind. Call him Brabazon if you like.'

'Yes—his stories are very much alike—that is to say they are all different,' I went on. 'There is the famous one "The Kiss." You know that?'

'I don't think so,' said Mr. Moore.

'A gem. An artillery officer, reserved, bullet-headed;

all his life one who watched others enjoying themselves, frowned upon by women. A long march, a billet in a town, and an invitation to the mess from a country house. He loses his way in one of the corridors and finds himself in a darkened room. A rustle of draperies —two soft arms are about his neck—a long kiss. Then there is a little gasp of fright—the apparition vanishes and he is out in the ballroom again. Which woman was it? And was it, wretched thought, a mistake on someone's part? The march is resumed, dust and grime and the sweat of horses—he sees how bright the stars are, the moon on the water, smells the poplars and the green earth; life almost suffocates him. He lives with a moment's memory. They return to the same town, the same invitation comes to the men. Well, after all?—he goes down to the river. There it is, the same water running by—last spring's, maybe, come back again. What answer is there to it all—it just runs by on and on. Ugh! What was the good of it? And he refuses the invitation.'

'Quite good,' said Mr. Moore, 'but not as good as mine. Then there is that one Tolstoy loved—a woman and a baby.'

'Yes, I recollect, and a civil servant.'

'No, no, you've got the wrong one, but continue.'

'It's all very simple,' I began. 'A miserable little civil servant out for his evening walk by the railway is stopped by a servant girl. "I'll teach you to seduce innocent girls, you just wait"—you'd wonder he had had the pluck. He returns home to find a bundle on the doorstep. What should he do—take it away some-

where? Yes, he will—and yet it has his nose, to be sure —and his eyes? Poor, helpless, little thing—it wasn't his fault. He might grow up to become a great man—not a civil servant, but a famous writer, or an artist, or a great engineer. He tells his wife. He is leaving very humiliated when he meets the gardener. "Have you seen a baby?" A peasant woman had left it on the door-step while she had been engaged downstairs and——'

'No,' broke in Mr. Moore, 'that wasn't the one I meant. A woman is married to a theatrical producer or something of the sort. She can think of nothing but the theatre—all day long it is scenery, props, plays, prompts, and everything else. He dies, and she marries a lumberman. Now it is trees, trees, trees. Nothing but afforestation from morning to night. He dies and she marries or lives with—I forget which—some other man. She grows irritable and disconsolate. Then she hears this man has a baby by another woman. Enough! All day long it's drawers and vests and bibs and bottles. That's a very good one, you know.'

'Still—there's an elusive quality about Tchekov which escapes us,' I tried to add. 'You see it clearer in his plays. We talk about Ibsen and the new theatre —scene, an architect's office, four plush chairs, chintz curtains, etc. etc. But it was Tchekov who would open the doors on the orchard—early daylight glinting on the cherry bloom. "Oh, my cherry orchard," says Madame—at once you have the orchard as a character—a character which moves with human destiny just as surely as the others.'

'Yes,' Mr. Moore joined in, 'I remember "The

Cherry Orchard"—a beautiful thing, and I enjoyed it very much,' and then paused. 'But why does Tchekov try to spoil his plays with those dreadful pieces of philosophy: "Do you know why I am here? Am I here? I don't know why I am alive. Am I alive?" These trite sayings are very annoying. I expect really they are a kind of conundrum.'

'Have you seen "The Seagull"?'

'No, I suppose I shall.'

'You'd enjoy that most of all. A young actress and an old actress—at least a famous one, for no actress is old—a young writer and an old writer . . .'

'Ah, well, I don't like plays or books written about artists,' Mr. Moore joined in. 'Nowadays everything you pick up has for a hero either a journalist or an artist. Why, in heaven's name, can't they write about ordinary human beings?'

'I suppose the reason is not far to seek,' I said. 'Don't you think it is deficiency of imagination? Priestley, who calls it a kind of literary cannibalism, says much modern fiction has no other recommendation than that it provides many inspired pages of autobiography.'

'Exactly, and I hate those sorts of books.'

'You should not read Aldous Huxley then.'

'Very clever, but just as with André Gide you come to think after a time that here is a blank sheet of paper with a title at the top of it.'

CHAPTER XII

Changes in literature. The touchstone of genius. Obscenity and art.

'You have asked me about the changes in literature in my own time?'

Mr. Moore paused, raised a finger reprovingly, and walked the length of the carpet. The question, I began to think, was a poor one. In the first place it was devoid of novelty, and in the second place it presupposed changes, and one could never be sure that Mr. Moore did.

'Life itself may not change,' I broke in; 'that is to say, you have already remarked that the way to arrive at a true estimate of the twelfth century is by remembering that what humanity is humanity always was.'

'True, did I say that?'

'You most certainly did.'

'No matter, it was what I would have said in any case.'

'But I suggest,' I broke in, 'that while humanity remains the same—as you say—the artist, whose job it is to interpret humanity to itself, is constantly changing—for better or worse.'

'And which do you say?'

'For better I should like to think.'

'And yet no one wrote like the Greeks.'

'Nevertheless,' I said in a last effort, 'I should like to know of the changes in your time.'

Mr. Moore halted again. The moment I thought had come.

'Yes,' he said, 'there have been changes. I will tell you a story to emphasise my point. Now listen carefully, and then you will be able to appreciate the extent of the changes—even, even as I do. Well,' and Mr. Moore's eyes were touched with just a suggestion of mischief, 'I have already told you that when I first came to England there was a select body of men who were concerned with the purity of our literature. It was I, you must also know, who caused these select worthies much anxiety; they also caused me much anxiety, but that is beside the point. The position, as these gentlemen saw it, was that literature was to be kept clean. But how was this to be accomplished? One must have some sort of ruling on the matter—such and such is to be allowed, and such and such is not to be allowed—then all would be simple. It was not an easy matter, you know, to decide what part of life should not have had any part in life, and what part, on the other hand, was perfectly exemplary. But if this scruple arose, which I very much doubt, they were not going to let it detain them in their noble work. And so they adopted a code or a formula. It was to be perfectly simple—that anyone who found himself the victim of a very ordinary impulse, and who had not gone through the sacred ceremony of marriage, was not to be allowed. Here then was the solution, that humanity was to be divided (or perhaps we should say, was to divide itself) into two great groups, the married and the unmarried. The one was the legitimate

ground of the artist, and the other—well, the other was illegitimate and that was enough. I take it upon myself to say that, if I was not the first, I was one of the first, to realise the difficulties in the way. Eventually I called upon Mr. ——, who was the moving spirit in this select assembly and who had caused me much financial loss, and perhaps some moral questionings, by his decision to suppress my books. He was very kind and appreciated many, if not all, of my qualms. "But supposing," I said to him, "supposing a book is beautifully written, even though it transgress your findings—just suppose it is beautifully written, what then?" "Beautiful writing," he replied with emphasis, "has nothing to do with it—the book is bad." We parted after a while, not before Mr. —— had, in compensation no doubt, regaled me with some of the dirtiest stories I have ever heard in my life. I pondered over this gentleman's findings until some gleam of light came to me. "Is this book about good people? Ah then, genius! Is it about improper people? Then, no matter —it can't have genius!" '

Mr. Moore was pacing the room again, his hands held out in emphasis, his voice raised, his face a little flushed with excitement. His words seemed to come in a series of explosions.

'And nowadays what do they ask? It is just this: "Is this book about ordinary people? What? it is! oh well, good no doubt. Obscenity? What obscenity! Ah, genius!" You get my point, do you? But it's very true, you know.'

CHAPTER XIII

The search for an idea. Mr. Moore explains his method of writing. The conception of the scene.

THE differences in Chelsea Sundays are only in degrees —most often they are dull, sometimes they are deadly dull, and sometimes again they are inexorable. So I thought, watching the drifting smoke lifting above the terra-cotta pots on to the dull void above, chasing the while a stray thought up and down the dusty window. But the thought escaped and the tin ash-tray continued to fill with guttering cigarette-ends while the white sheet of paper remained a reproach.

And turning disconsolately to the bookcase, I saw the whole row by Mr. Moore and fell to calculating in my mind the number of words on each page and the number of pages and the number of books. . . . The ideas must have come easily, I thought, and not one that can be discarded. And reaching out for a volume it fell open at a chapter and I read:

> The most that I can hope for to relieve the monotony of Ebury Street, a long narrow slum, in which I took a house in the Coronation year, is a new idea.

And the new idea I could think of—the only idea—was how to cover several sheets of manuscript with something which did not violently displease the writer. And walking down the King's Road my idea gathered strength, so that when I was shown up to the familiar

study I asked, almost without a preliminary, 'Mr. Moore, how do you write?'

And Mr. Moore, taken a little off his guard, stayed his hand in the act of reaching for a book and, with that disarming smile, replied, 'As best I can, my dear fellow.' He would have dismissed the subject, but I continued.

'Ah, then, the purely prosaic act of writing?'

And Mr. Moore, whose thoughts were still with the book he was fondling, replied absently, 'Oh—well, I begin by dictating.'

'And so you dictate?'

Mr. Moore looked over enquiringly.

'It seems inconceivable,' I added. 'When any humorist wishes to draw a picture of a topsy-turvy world —all the ordinary processes reversed—he has only to suggest George Moore in feverish haste speaking into a dictaphone, and at the other extreme Mr. Edgar Wallace wrestling with a semicolon.'

'Yes, but the first process is rubbish. What I dictate is nothing at all. It is only after two or three times that I even begin to recognise it. The first thing in writing, to my mind, is a conception of the scene—the environment, the planning of it, the proportioning of it in regard to itself and the story of which it is a part. It is easy enough to write when you have it before you. But I have to try several times before I can get that. I must get it into my head—no, take possession of it—if you understand me. I cannot get it by looking into the fire or walking round Belgrave Square. Sometimes it fails completely. It is of no use painting the galley-pots with

eighteenth-century figures or any other figures. Afterwards comes the choice of words, the felicitous phrases, the conception of the scene—how much to put in and how much to leave out—since no scene is to be isolated but all must depend upon each.'

'Well, the legend is fulfilled. It would be a good idea to take over a house opposite and open a business for the acquisition and sale of George Moore manuscripts, with the American market in view.'

'But, as I say, there are no manuscripts. It's impossible to say just when the finished thing takes shape. But why this cross-examination?'

'Ah, there was a reason.'

'There is a reason for most things—so many reasons—and that is the difficulty. But let us first have a cigar. I allow myself but one a day—and after the toil of the day is over.'

'One can philosophise best over a pipe—next, perhaps, a cigar.'

'Philosophise? The virtue of a cigar lies, where?—in smoke. And now philosophy. . . . But that is another matter. And now——'

CHAPTER XIV

Mr. Moore explains that he has done with seeking and taken refuge in art. He explains he cannot put his faith in humanity.

MR. MOORE was back in his favourite chair, watching the rings of smoke slowly ascending. The fire was burning brightly, the curtains were drawn—everything spoke of comfort. And I began: 'Mr. Moore, I am very discouraged. As I have been writing up our series of talks and have found they have become a patchwork quilt, and not the piece of delicate embroidery I had conceived, I comforted myself with the thought that dialogue is always scrappy; the spoken word—if it *is* the spoken word—always abrupt, since extempore speech, which is undisciplined thought, is like the wind which bloweth where it listeth——'

'But unity, unity—all, all is unity,' broke in Mr. Moore. 'One must never forget unity. I withdrew my book "Impressions and Opinions" from the American edition because I thought it lacked the first, the last, essential of a work of art.'

'And you mean unity?'

'Of course. What you must get is a preconceived idea, just as I had with Gosse when we would discuss, for example, the possibility of the English aesthetic novel. So, for that matter, had Eckermann. I am not comparing myself with Goethe, you understand, though a

molehill and a mountain may have something in common.'

'A preconceived idea I have often had, Mr. Moore,' I replied, 'a most exhaustive, and perhaps exhausting, plan of attack. But you speak so entertainingly on everything under the sun that I am left adrift, rudderless, in a sea of conversations.'

'Oh, dear, no—you flatter me, I'm sure.'

'And now,' I continued, 'I have been reading "Avowals." A first-year student standing before a "Mike" and wondering why the local County Council had given him a gold medal would be in no worse a plight. While Gosse says what he has to say, he says it —if you will forgive me—in a way that George Moore would have written it. And when he came to read "Avowals" he must have been staggered by his own eloquence. He might have said, with Mr. Lloyd George (who was describing a great Welsh preacher), "No man spoke like this." '

'Well, in fact, they were entirely imaginary. I sat down and wrote them, and that was all there was to it. And Gosse liked them very much. No—not all. There was one case about Lamb and his book "Rosamond Gray." I could not imagine what he would say, so I looked it up among his work, gathered his opinion and worked it into the dialogue. And what do you think happened? That was the very one to which he took exception. My reply was, "What I made you say was what you *did* say. In the other cases it was what I thought you might say." '

'It would make things much easier were I to do the same—but it wouldn't be you.'

'Well, remember a previous discussion—about plagiarism, wasn't it?—and we agreed that if a man improves upon the original he has every justification for doing so. Why do you laugh?'

'I was wondering if improving on the original meant improving on "Avowals." I felt in reading that book that I had never learnt to write English, and thought it best to give up trying.'

'Oh, dear, no. That's the wrong attitude. You might write better than I do, for all I know. I write adequately, we will say, but that is all. And then, remember, I have been writing for forty years and you for some three or four. And no one does anything before he is thirty.'

'Chatterton had finished at seventeen,' I broke in.

'And most of it was copied,' went on Mr. Moore, scarcely noticing the interruption. 'Just do your best, and no one can do better than that. And the only biography worth a hang, to my mind, is the biography in dialogue. What is the use of an account of "The Mummer's Wife" or "Héloïse and Abélard"? If people want to know about them, they read them. If, on the other hand, people want to know about me, it's what I say that matters. The three biographies done in this way are the best on record. There is the "Life of Johnson" by—what's that man's name?'

'Boswell.'

'By Boswell—all dialogue. Then there's Ecker-

mann's "Life of Goethe," which we have already mentioned, and which may outlive Goethe as the bust outlives the city. And the third is——'

'You are not going to say Brousson's "Anatole France"?'

'Certainly, and why not? You did not read it in the original? Well, that explains it. No one could translate it properly. I have known the language pretty well, and if I spent twelve years I might make something of it—but only something. It is the familiar French slang, and the occasional old words which cannot properly be interpreted into English, which give life to the book. Without this jargon, France would not live in it at all.'

'No—that was not the reason,' I replied. 'It was simply that France, as Brousson has given him to us, is so unutterably loathsome that I cannot believe the portrait to be true in its entirety. He seemed to have no faith in anything. Voltaire, heaven knows, is bad enough, but France with his sniggering is like a draught of foul air. He sees a Madonna and makes a wretched joke about the model. And so on, all the time.'

'And yet,' replied Mr. Moore, 'Swift is very unpleasant, but you cannot get rid of "Gulliver's Travels" by saying that you don't like it or that you don't admire it. France, as a nation, seems to breed a very violent type of agnostic; and Anatole France has best been described as not a very great writer but a very perfect one.'

'That's the penalty of scepticism, don't you think?

No faith—no great works of art. One needn't believe in a clergyman's God or in half a hundred things we are taught to believe, but one must believe in something.'

'True,' said Mr. Moore. 'You merely show your own shallowness if you laugh at a man who has given up his life for an ideal, whether we consider it wise or foolish. Yet that is what France is always doing—we discussed this before—he specialises in jibes. A man continually sceptical towards not one thing but everything never gets far. There can be a credulity in incredulity. One can be incredulously credulous. On one point, however, I have a definite belief. If God means us to understand the question of life and death and eternity, He would give us different brains. Attempts at doing so by the various creeds are as ridiculous as thought-reading. If anything is certain, it is that human intelligence is incapable of answering these questions. We have been talking for 3000 years and what have we found? Three thousand, did I say: no, 5000 or 10,000.'

'And yet, by nature, man is a seeker after the infinite. Or is everything a question of rebellion and acceptance? And if acceptance, what does acceptance mean?'

'For my part, I have done with seeking,' Mr. Moore replied. 'I have sought and found and taken refuge in art. Art to me is elemental. Men put their faith in many things. One can, let us say, put one's faith in humanity. I cannot do so. To begin with, there are too many people born—and too many of an inferior type—for me to take much interest in them. There is a great earth-

quake in Sicily and the city of Messina—no, let us suppose Pompeii is threatened again. We read that the people escaped unhurt; and yet the loss to civilisation would have been very much greater if a relic of this old civilisation had been lost. How weigh up Shelley's poems in terms of human life? There is just one in the world, let us say—would a human life, no, 10,000 human lives, be worth it? And yet we hear on every hand "the sacredness of human life." There is nothing sacred in it. It is one of the fallacies of modern times. At the time of the bombing of London, I called to see the man who sells newspapers at the end of the street. They had been bombing the hospital [1]—it turned out, only one of the lodges—and no damage had been done to the main building. I say, "I hope that great and beautiful example of architecture was not touched," or words to that effect. The man threw up his hands so. "But bricks and mortar can always be put together," he said, "but human life . . ." "Can they?" I replied. "That is where you are wrong. And as for human life, any kitchenmaid and any scullion can produce it in five minutes." The proprietor of the shop did not like it—there were many people in it at the time and they all put their hands up. But it made him think. He said to me afterwards, "I suppose it's true what you say." I said, "Of course it's true, and, what is more, so obvious." '

'Most people would be shocked, I have no doubt,' I broke in.

'Most people believe what they think they should be-

[1] The Royal Hospital, Chelsea.

lieve, that is the difficulty,' was the reply. 'But to return. Art to me is sacred. It is my religion. If there is no art, we all become savages again. Socialism—though we don't want to discuss politics—pretends that everyone will stand out or that no one will stand out, or whatever it is. At all events, there will be no art. Plato himself admits it. We have been waiting a long time for this final destruction. It has come to pass, however, in a different way—through general education. Why do you laugh? It is perfectly true. Self-education is all right—don't imagine I have any fault to find with that. But to pour knowledge down the backs of poor people in order that one may give them a smattering of French or Latin or arithmetic! For, believe me, the uneducated man is the man who always succeeds. No—not always perhaps—but education never did any more than take the edge off a man's intelligence. It has the same effect as a grinding-stone on a very fine razor—it only succeeds in taking the steel off. It would be very interesting to consider how many self-educated men have, within the last forty years, risen to the highest positions in science, art, and the great callings. Richard Wagner, the greatest musician that ever lived, taught himself music—so, for that matter, did Elgar.'

'I have no doubt you can prove that education means comparatively little to the artist—that is why art schools seem to——'

'Art schools, yes, since you mention them. The art school teaches them to make art out of art, and art is made out of Nature. Literature, too, is made out of

Nature. If you want to write, the first thing to do is to forget other people's writings. The curse of to-day is that we read too much and are taught too much. Education! I tackled this in a book, "Conversations in Ebury Street," which has only appeared in a limited edition. It was the best article ever written on the subject. However, I am not writing the article—you are. This is what it comes to. . . . The supposition is that by education you can re-create the human being. The Hebrew prophets knew, 5000 years ago, that this could not be done. How else will you interpret "The leopard cannot change his spots" and "A man cannot add an inch to his stature"? If you could breed a man—yes. But to say education will change a boy from what he was is as foolish as to suppose that by watering a white rose-tree you can produce red roses. If you had begun to breed them, say, ten generations ago, all well and good. But then comes the difficulty, that we don't know the direction in which to breed, though with animals and plants we do. But if you were to pour all the water in the world, the white rose-tree would produce white roses over and over again. Then to take a boy at twelve—the usual age—is the same as saying, "My tree is going to bloom to-morrow, I will make haste with the watering-can to-day!" Ten generations too late! Still, the dominie who comes along with the water knows no better.'

CHAPTER XV

Mr. Moore discusses the futility of ideas, and ends with some remarks on certain earnest young men.

THE raw east wind which ran up Ebury Street on this Sunday morning flapped a poster on a hoarding and one saw that the League of Something or Another was to discuss something or another, under an important chairman. And I must have wondered of the time when I would have money enough to attend all these lectures and thought of the knowledge that had already gone by, and reproached myself and thought Thomas à Kempis a poor substitute for many University Extension Lectures. There was a new spirit abroad in the land, I thought, and again it was young men who were to see visions; while the old, they were to dream dreams. And yet, what was the use of ideals and ideas, if we were to lose them? And, above all, the half-guinea I had paid to hear more of Ibsen had been well spent, though Mr. Shaw had said he had 'recapitulated' Shakespeare at 30, Molière at 40, and Goethe at 50. How, I thought, could anyone 'recapitulate' Shakespeare, and perhaps chew the cud of 'Lear'? But the young men laughed a little over Shakespeare, for what were his ideas?

And when I had reached 121 and Clara had shown me up, I found much thought on ideas in the abstract had robbed me of a single one.

Mr. Moore was seated before a blazing fire in his study, a book in his hand, which he laid down in his graceful, deferential way. There were a few reference books lying on the table and on the writing-desk the piled-up typescript of 'Aphrodite in Aulis,' remote enough it seemed. 'Good,' I thought: 'work is over, or, rather, it will not be begun.'

'And now,' and Mr. Moore's voice brought my mind flying back to the novel and art, religion, faith, aestheticism. I searched them all through, and not an idea presented itself. A text, I thought—if only I could think of a text. 'And now,' went on Mr. Moore, 'what are we to talk about?'

'The thought has gone,' I said, playing for time. 'It has just slipped my memory.'

'Never mind,' was the reply, and no tone could be kinder. 'It will return—but is there something on your mind?'

The moment had come. 'Mr. Moore, when the young men reproach the old' . . . 'as they frequently do . . . ,' and the quiet, kindly voice had broken in again, but I continued—'it is because the old refuse to understand us. You know the line of your own Tourgenieff, "to all whom the heart beats for at twenty." The ideas of youth——'

'Ah, my young friend,' Mr. Moore broke in. 'Ideas very soon fade, you know. Rather, they go out of fashion. They may seem very wonderful, very new, very revolutionary . . . but in three years . . . Not in three years; in thirty, then? If they are new, someone may have thought of them before. But supposing

you were to have drawn, well and true, a round man 5000 years ago? That man would still live. Where would be Socrates without Plato? I am only trying to prove to you that the best books in the world are pictures of men. Draw a man and he lives, an idea and it is outlived. He need not be an important man; for prestige, in so far as character is concerned, is a mere accident. Now, if an intelligent man were to take down the life and ideas and sympathies of, let us say, a Norfolk farmer, he would draw a man who would endure. Will you tell me where are the ideas in "Robinson Crusoe"?'

'To have a message,' I answered. 'Message: there is magic in the word in spite of everything. You would meet the postman half-way, it seems, tear out of his hand the letter, and find it is a tradesman's bill. I am thinking now of some of the men of your generation—no, not Shaw—who streamed out heresies in the thick Victorian fog. And was it, after all, hot air: for in that road where are sold second-hand books, are whole *rooms* of Ruskin.'

'Ruskin—I cannot discuss him, for I have not read him.' Mr. Moore paused and added, 'But were I able to draw like him, I should never have troubled to write.'

'And so,' I said, 'one would like to come back to the barman across the road and wonder what he thinks. One would like to give up theorising and see life whole——'

'I must interrupt,' and Mr. Moore's hands had gone up, 'and, if you will allow me, that most ridiculous phrase is the cause of the interruption. A truly ridicu-

lous phrase, and it sends my mind back to the man in mutton-chop whiskers who set a whole generation of young men wrong, a generation of, I suspect, earnest young men all of whom wore spectacles and all of whom insisted on seeing life whole.'

'A slip,' I replied with a poor grace. 'I must have heard it somewhere.'

'What has Matthew Arnold to answer?' he went on. 'It is a phrase which is the cause of such painful memories. One of my dearest friends—and he, like those young men, wears spectacles—has been trying to see life whole all his life. How can you see life whole, how can you see life steadily? And how senseless it is. And yet it was grasped at by everyone, not because they knew its meaning but because it seemed vast and enormous. And so always I see that endless procession of young men, all with spectacles, heads erect, shoulders back; there they go, clippity—clump, clippity—clump—all determined to see life whole, all determined to see life steadily; the strayed revellers shall we call them?'

CHAPTER XVI

Mr. Moore believes no writer of repute made any concessions to the public. The thousandth man who does not do the art of his contemporaries. Nor does anyone write with the deliberate idea of getting the public. 'One can only be oneself,' he says, and the text agreed on is according to the gospel of Peer Gynt.

'YOU ask me how much the public should be considered, and I say, not at all.'

My eyebrows must have gone up, for Mr. Moore added, 'You disagree?'

'In part,' I replied, 'for I have always imagined some kind of a compromise between earth and heaven.'

'A compromise—pshaw—Why a compromise?'

'A prince can never forget his people—else he is no prince; and a writer can never forget his public, or he may retire too far into himself and lose contact with the Earth. Shakespeare was never allowed to forget the groundlings—and so, then, while there was a Hamlet there was a Falstaff, too.'

'As you know, I doubt the existence of that man.'

'True. But I suggest the public is a . . .'

'And so,' said Mr. Moore, 'a writer must set out to please the public? And if he please them to be sure the public will applaud, and if he please them more, and he will certainly try, the public will applaud more. And then when the public is tired, the public kicks him out, that is all. Let us remember the case of Villon, who feasted with kings and princes and whom this public

you speak of worshipped. And then let us look at this same poor Villon warming his withered hands before a fire of hemstocks. And so if you court public approbation you embark on a perilous voyage. But if you have set out to please yourself—the hardest of all taskmasters—I suggest you have attempted something better. And so I suggest no writer of repute made any concession. One may say that everybody does the art of his time—he can never entirely dissociate himself from the age in which he lives. Apart from that, no. If he feels very intensely he may be sure he will find people to do so with him. It so happens that many people have not very much in them. Everyone has a certain amount, but everyone has not the enormous amount that, shall we say, Balzac had, so much that to express it all meant his neglect of form. But few people have ideas on every subject—they come to the end of their tether—or, shall we say, there is no more water in the well?'

'And this one man,' I broke in, 'defies the public, defies his time . . . ?'

'Yes, but as I have said, he can never entirely escape his time, for he must, as he lives, be coloured by his age. But he defies his time in that he never really reflects it. A great artist is always before his time or behind it. And there is this secret at the bottom which he is aware of, but cannot explain—that he must go on. Thinking about it won't do any good. There are the ninety men—no, the nine and ninety men who conceive art as their contemporaries conceive it, but there is yet this hundredth man who turns his back upon it.

No man ever turned his back on the art of his day as Debussy. But when he was competing for the Prix de Rome he knew that his own art would never get it. So what did he do? He went out and copied Massenet. He had never done so before, and he never felt disposed to do so again; to him this mere reproduction of the prevalent art of the day was a job which was to be undertaken in an emergency.'

'And so your advice . . . ,' I said.

'My advice, no, no, no.'

'Your counsel?'

'No, neither advice, nor counsel, nor precept would I give. This is the greatest fallacy of all. One simply cannot advise anyone. They will do good work or they will do bad work. They may go with the stream or they may go against it. But neither do they do on advice nor counsel. Everyone does what he can do. That is almost the only thing on which we can be anything like definite. It is a mistake to imagine people write badly to get the public; it is a mistake to imagine a man writes over the public because he thinks this is as it should be. The man who writes for the public, and the man who turns his back on the public, are doing what they were meant to do. There is no more that can be said.'

'And the man who turns his back on the public, should not be commended for his courage?' I replied.

'No, why should he? He is merely being himself as each one of the other ninety-nine might also say. Let me give an instance. X is a painter friend of mine and he would paint red things, officers in scarlet coats, and so on. However, he was sufficient of an artist to see

the vermilion—those red things—was abominable; and having seen Whistler he tried to do synthetic painting, with a reduced palette, as he. But in time he discovered his mistake and returned, and became himself.'

'And now, Mr. Moore, we have the text.'

'The text?'

'It is taken from the gospel according to Peer Gynt —to be one's self!'

CHAPTER XVII

Mr. Moore speaks of his later style and suggests its derivation.

ON this afternoon Mr. Moore, I suspected, was going to talk on education, and I feared for the consequences, for it seemed to me there was little more to be said on the question. As I loosened the books under my arm and prepared to sit down opposite him I wondered what ill-advised remark may have provoked him to begin on this subject which, of all, I was only too anxious to avoid. 'By and by,' he had begun, 'everyone will realise what a terrible mistake has been made. It is like prohibition—people will realise it some day, not in my time, it is true—not in yours possibly.' Mr. Moore paused a moment and sighed. 'I suppose this foolish world must continue,' he added.

And taking the opportunity of a moment's lull, I opened the book on my knee as noisily as I could.

'What is that?' said Mr. Moore.

' "Héloïse and Abélard," ' I replied.

'Mine?'

'Yes.'

Mr. Moore seemed to take no conscious pleasure in the remark and it seemed to me he looked at the book askance. But seizing the opportunity I began. 'That style of yours, Mr. Moore! It was surely perfect in "The Brook Kerith," but in "Héloïse and Abélard"! Only yesterday I opened the book at random and came

upon a sentence—I cannot remember what it was about—and yet some image remains, austere and beautiful, like the spire of a cathedral seen in the white light of a morning frost. You cannot compare the writing in "The Confessions," fine as it was, to this mellow resonant tune beating, beating with the slow majesty of the sea waves. Many edges have been worn away in the years, and something else, too, has crept in.'

Mr. Moore was silent a moment and I continued. 'I should like to read you a passage if I may.'

'But why,' he said with a trace of irritation in his voice, 'I should probably know it, so what purpose would be served? However, if it pleases you to do so, continue by all means.'

'It occurred to me,' I replied, 'that there is not a single passage in the whole book which does not contain perfect workmanship. Someone else might have written it differently, but it seems to me that George Moore could not have written it otherwise, because it is his best and there is only one best.'

'I am afraid you are too indulgent—too kind to me,' said Mr. Moore, breaking into a smile.

'I shall open the book at random,' I continued, 'and read some ten or a dozen lines. But I am convinced before I begin.'

'Then don't begin.'

The monastery is closed for the night, the porter answered again and again, and slammed back the slide, leaving the friar and the nuns to find their way past the great firs, whose shelving branches seemed to be the

roosts of innumerable peacocks, ghostly birds in the mild moonlight, whose long white tails set Madelon crying: Ghosts or angels! let us away; and her cries, awakening the peacocks, set them all screaming, till Abélard began to think that the angels beyond the stars could not fail to hear.

'That is a passage chosen haphazardly,' I said, with a note of triumph.

'It is written adequately, let us say,' and Mr. Moore made a gesture with his hands.

'If that is so, it is a comfort to write adequately,' I added. 'But I would like to know a little of your later style. Nothing, as you would say, hangs by itself from the moon. . . .'

And Mr. Moore replied, 'As you know, I am in the habit of reading French a great deal and sometimes I write it. I was never induced to write a book in a foreign language and, unlike Conrad, I never tried. Then on one occasion I was writing an epistle dedicatory, you would call it, to "The Lake." At this time I had been writing in different ways wondering which was better than the other. However, this epistle dedicatory was in French, and one sentence in particular pleased me, a description of the Seine and the poplars and the swallows flying low over the water. It is rather a good sentence that, though rather long. I remember I sat back and wondered to myself—"Why don't you write like that in English?" There was a good deal of use of the present participle—it doesn't do in French, though in English, and possibly Greek, it is all right. And so it was to come about that I was to find an English style in French.'

CHAPTER XVIII

Mr. Moore explains why he forsook the muse. What is poetry?

"I HAVE had a great piece of luck to-day.' And Mr. Moore was obviously pleased. 'I have just reached the passage in my book,' he continued, 'where the sculptor is held up. He cannot proceed. "I have no idea of how to go on," he tells his brother. "I have done everything, but it is no use. What I like in the morning I detest in the evening, and what I like in the evening I detest in the morning." His brother suggests that he should go and consult the oracle. So far everything was all right. But now you see what happens? The oracle has to reply, and the oracle wrote in hexameters. He is to suggest to the sculptor that he is to go down to the sea, and there in the greenwood Aphrodite will reveal herself. It was a problem, and I did not feel easy. Then quite suddenly the hexameters came to me, and here they are.' And he waved a sheet of manuscript.

Since thy quest is a pattern, betake thee now to the greenwood,
Sculptor, and wait her coming beneath the shadows of plane-trees;
Shaking her golden locks exultant alone in the sunrise,
Thou shalt behold her at last, foam-born Aphrodite in Aulis.

'And so, Mr. Moore, if it be only four hexameters, you have returned to the old art.'

'The old art, how so?' Mr. Moore was pacing the room, wandering about a little uncertain of himself and of his direction, more inclined to trust his feet to carry him the length of the room, while Clara, in a desperate effort, was coaxing the smoky fire with a newspaper. This domestic interlude would unsettle him. He preferred the great arm-chair, legs out, arms crossed, eyelids half-closed, 'absorbing the vapour and returning it in the flood,' as Mr. Gladstone described his own system of speech, but more often allowing the words to ooze from him, as it were, in a rich, trickling stream.

'And how so?' he repeated.

'Well,' I replied, 'I have searched high and low for your two volumes of poetry until Mr. Bennett explains they are now worth £50.'

'More than that, I expect.'

'And Mr. Bennett, having first assured us that he is "the most convinced 'fan' of George Moore on this round earth," believes they are of no literary value.'

Mr. Moore's equanimity was unruffled—he did not think they were considerable, it appeared, but Mr. Bennett had overstressed the case, and in an impersonal way, and with no other desire than to readjust the critical standards, he continued pleasantly enough.

'Oh, no, it's absurd to say they have no literary value, because it's just what I would do to-day. I never pretended to be a poet, but they compare quite favourably with much modern stuff which is without any originality or any original outlook whatever. Now there is one about the death of a consumptive girl which is

really quite nice—stay and I will bring it to you and you may read it.'

'Of course,' he says in explanation, 'they were very immature. This was written at the age of two and three and twenty—and a very immature two and three and twenty. I couldn't verify any better—but it's a way of looking at things that is unexpected, don't you think?' And in that half-humorous, half-pathetic way of his which one can never forget, 'I'm sure Bennett would be crucified before he could do anything as well.'

I reminded Mr. Moore of his dictum that poets were the best prose writers and suggested that the reverse was true, asking why, having begun with poetry, he should have left it for prose and never, all through the years, felt any temptation to return unless it were a mere necessity for a novel.

And Mr. Moore replied: 'There was a very good reason. I did not see the possibility of adding anything to the volume of English poetry. Whenever I wanted to write verses I did so. They were never very bad. S——, who is not a bad poet in his way, told me that I had too much to say to be a poet, and that is probably true. Or it may be I had not the daring vision —I cannot say.'

I replied that there was poetry enough in 'The Brook Kerith' and in 'Héloïse and Abélard,' that much of the best prose I knew from Isaiah onwards (was Isaiah prose?) was shot through with poetry, that poetry transfigured . . .

'And . . . now,' said Mr. Moore, 'are we discussing prose?'

'No,' I replied, 'poetry.'

'Yet you were right, there is always poetry in prose . . .'

'So what is prose—or rather, what is poetry?'

'Ah, now we are beginning. You ask me to define poetry, and you may ask anyone and what will he say? But I am going to try. I suppose it is a keenness of feeling, that is all, a finer sense than most people have—a facility for detecting the similitudes and affinities of things. It is to be found in prose just as much as in verse, for it is only the metre that makes the difference. In prose—why, in everything. A picture that has no poetry in it, or a statue, or a piece of music—you know it at once. Therefore this is our first finding—that the substance is the same. That finer sense, that spiritual sense—for we have no other word—is in the man, surely not on the paper. All that he writes is coloured by his vision, and so it is an accident whether he choose prose or verse. It is most likely that if he has much to say he will choose prose, and if little the short poem.'

CHAPTER XIX

'A hair's-breadth divides humanity from paganism,' says Mr. Moore. Some thoughts on the Prayer Book controversy.

A LETTER which came from Mr. Moore contained a sentence which I read again and again:

> The extract shows plainly that only a hair's-breadth divides humanity from paganism. All through the Old Testament the Jews were yearning after paganism, yet the Archbishop of Canterbury advocated the reservation of the Sacrament.

It had been of St. Paul I had wanted to speak the next time we met, for I had made the discovery much later than I should have done, and, as with Mr. Moore, I was not ashamed to admit it. Coleridge had styled the Epistle to the Ephesians the divinest composition of man, and, forgetting the many chapters we had had to learn by heart in childhood, I took down the lambskin Bible and began to read. Religion, in its essentials, seemed to St. Paul so easy and simple a thing, and now it was so complicated. This I thought, walking on a sudden impulse through Hyde Park, hearing the twenty men on the twenty different boxes, all showing the one and only way to heaven. With the noise and dust of Hyde Park Corner behind, I stumbled upon a Salvation Army band in one of those little side streets, half mews, half thoroughfare, in Belgravia: the braying of the band, the bleating of voices, and the rhyth-

mic beat of the drum. . . . And again I thought of Mr. Moore's letter. Nothing, surely, could be more earnest or less material than this. One half of the world, it seemed, intent on the salvation of the other half. It was a manifestation of the Pauline spirit, at any rate.

In Ebury Street, Mr. Moore was resting in the armchair, a replica, it seemed, of the Orpen on the wall, did I not remember Mr. Moore's own words, that one could not improve upon Nature, though one may get a good line from it. But there was no longer that fleeting expression of mischief dodging like a shadow across the face, the gay and twinkling eyes: instead, the bent head, the suggestion of weariness, the silent preoccupation with his own thoughts, which only now and then broke into the features.

'Your letter, Mr. Moore? What do you mean by a hair's-breadth dividing humanity from paganism?'

'It is so, surely.'

'I cannot think that it is.'

'If you think hard enough and think long enough, then perhaps . . . Have you ever thought of the Golden Calf in its modern application?'

'Well, hardly: Philistinism perhaps.'

'No, no. Philistinism is a thing for Philistines. Have you read in the newspapers about the Prayer Book?'

'Yes, I can say that I have.'

'And hasn't it conveyed anything to you—not in the purely temporal sense as another something or another on the Statute Book, but in the wider sense as—

only, I dislike the term—as a student of humanity?'

'Well——'

'I can see that it hasn't. However, it might have done so. All through the ages history repeats itself. That is a commonplace, and, like most commonplaces, is true. The Israelites found themselves unable to remain true to the spirit which giveth life, and so it has been all down the centuries. If anything is definite, it is just this: that Protestantism is too beautiful a thing for mankind, which demands, before all else, the material even in so spiritual a thing as the reconciliation of man with his Maker. It so happens that now, in the ordinary order of things, we are approaching normal, or an ordinary manifestation of idolatry or paganism, or what you will. Man is demanding, as his right, that he worship not an ideal but a thing. Whether you call that thing the Golden Calf or Perpetual Reservation matters nothing to me.'

'I certainly think, if I may say so, that you are prejudiced against Catholicism,' I interrupted.

'That may be, if you will only explain to me what you mean by "prejudiced." How can a man be prejudiced? He arrives at his own way of thinking. He can do no more. For my own part, I see plainly enough that the natural inclination of man is towards idolatry, and I say so plainly enough. I also add, however, that in the modern sense we have not seen its worst aspects. . . .'

'It is a great pity, because I wanted to speak to you of St. Paul, and now the atmosphere is too cramped, too narrow for a man who——'

'Was the greatest man in the world.'

'You think so?'

'Most certainly.'

'Then I shall look forward with more than ordinary interest——'

'Why say with "more than ordinary interest"? With "great" interest perhaps, if you mean great interest, or——'

'I most certainly do.'

CHAPTER XX

Mr. Moore regards St. Paul as the greatest man in the world. He conceives the death of the apostle.

FOR some time I had been dominated by the figure of St. Paul. It was Mr. Moore who had led me to him. Slowly and patiently he assumed shape, much as a mountain does, appearing at last in all its towering immensity. The spacious spirit of the man, which was to overwhelm the world beyond all thought and reason! I would try, in a poor way, to realise the few facts of his life, to imagine him in all his simple dignity, passing over the waste places of the world and, like the sun, bringing life again to the earth. And I could not help wondering how he was to die. Death, it seemed, was a poor thing to encompass him, though encompass him it did. And one evening, with St. Paul in my thoughts, I called on Mr. Moore. The dying sunlight was filtering into Ebury Street, and a stray finger caught up his white head as he sat in the chair by the window. It was a quiet, dying evening in the late summer.

'It was of St. Paul I was thinking,' I said without hesitancy.

'St. Paul!' and Mr. Moore shook his head gravely. 'I am always thinking of St. Paul, too,' he replied. 'And the more I think of him, the more the occasion for wonder. As you know, I regard him as the greatest man the world has ever known. Martin Luther comes a

long way behind. I once wrote a play on Martin Luther. . . .'

'You once wrote a play on St. Paul.'

'Yes, but it did not do justice to the subject—if anything ever can do St. Paul justice. Just ponder on the great figures of history—Alexander the Great, Caesar, Napoleon—what have they left us but their names? Names!' and Mr. Moore's hands went up in a gesture, 'only names, and small things are names. But St. Paul's teaching lives now as it ever lived, and so, we may say, does the apostle himself.'

'Yes, but he, too, died.'

'But where?'

'I wonder.'

'But why wonder? I can see him dying.' Mr. Moore paused a moment. The fingers of sunlight still strayed about the room, the ticking of the Louis Quinze clock, the occasional footstep down the street, that and Mr. Moore's mellow voice rising and falling: 'He was not put to death, you may be sure. The many references in the "Acts" make it quite clear that the Romans, so far from desiring his death, were most anxious to keep him alive. What, you may say, happened then? I can see his death in Spain. Rested, after two years in Rome, as we know, the old thirst to wander came over him again. He knew that his work would not be finished until he reached the end of the world. And so he will go to Spain: for that, to him, was the end of the world. And, to anyone with imagination, it is easy to see him on this long day. His infirmities are great, but his will is strong; and so I watch his feeble footsteps until

he reaches the middle of the valley, lifting up his eyes and thinking only of the village beyond the serrated mountains. On, on, he must go—a wanderer always.

'I wrote a little piece about his death which is not now published in my books, though I think it well written. If you would like to have it, you may. Stay a moment and I will read it to you.' And Mr. Moore, as though transfigured, his voice taking on some unexplainable richness, began to read:

> As his strength departs, a shepherd lad, unmindful of his flock, comes to his help, and Paul, mistaking the shepherd for him whom he has loved so long and ardently, cries: My Lord Jesus, give me strength to reach the village beyond the mountains and preach thy resurrection and salvation through thee; for my Lord Jesus, they are guiltless—thy name has never reached their ears; it is but just that they should hear it. The world perishes year by year; in a few it will be gone. My dear Lord Jesus, thy servant comes to thee at the end of a long day, weary of the world but refreshed by sight of thee, and still ardent to bring the innocent of law and sin to salvation. Bend down, Lord Jesus, till I see thee, whom I have seen so often in dreams, sleeping, waking, in perils in the sea, in deserts. . . .
>
> The shepherd lad, lifting Paul from the rocks, gives him to drink from his gourd, and Paul revives a little, but the vision of Jesus come to him remains as clear as before, and he cries to the shepherd in a language that the lad has never heard: Give me strength, Lord Jesus, to return to Corinth, whither false prophets have come; my Galatians are listening to false teaching, a gospel different from the one they heard from me, which I received not from men but in revelation. Jesus whom on earth I knew always in the spiritual body, I come to thee, to thy kingdom, to thy love, to my salvation, to live

everlasting in thy love that I have earned in many tribulations, once at Derbe, where I was stoned, and afterwards at Thyatira, where I received forty stripes save one; persecuted by the Jews and false brethren I was always. And forget not these things, dear Lord, but take thy faithful servant in thine arms and bear him into thy house, made not with hands but in the eternity of the heavens.

After speaking these words Paul fell back, and seeing him dead the shepherd lad seeks for a cavity among the rocks; finding one, he throws the body into it, heaping stones upon it to save it from wolves and jackals; which done he follows his flock, understanding nothing, but conscious that something great and noble had passed out of the world.

Mr. Moore had ended. For some moments neither of us spoke.

'I think, if I may say so,' I said with all sincerity—for Mr. Moore's reading had deeply impressed me—'it is one of the most beautiful pieces of prose I can remember.'

'That is kind of you,' he replied. 'As I think now, it is not badly written. But then my sympathy for St. Paul helped me, no doubt.'

CHAPTER XXI

The Russian novelists—A reverie—Mr. Moore thinks of Dostoieffsky as a sculptor in snow, but sets him higher than Hall Caine.

As I walked down towards Ebury Street one evening, I held in my hand a newspaper, and in it was an article by Mr. Arnold Bennett in which he had said, without any qualification, that the twelve greatest novels in the world were all Russian. I had long thought so myself, without having read as many novels as Mr. Bennett, or being able to rest on so mature a judgment. By the time I had reached Sloane Square the conviction had grown on me to such an extent that I thought of stepping into the Post Office and dispatching a post-card to Mr. Bennett: 'Dear sir, you are quite right,' which is meant to imply that a young man concurs in every particular. I thought that Dostoieffsky himself would have done so, but Tourgenieff would most certainly have not, nor, for that matter, would Tolstoy; and, taking my cue from Tourgenieff and the knowledge that I was in England, I crossed the Square in the company of the three great Russians. And which of you, I thought, is to remain behind! Tourgenieff, Mr. Moore will certainly welcome; and their talk, could I sit in a corner, taking notes, would be as light as thistledown, as limpid as a lake, as graceful as a pine, as . . . But, thinking of the difficulty that would arise when the great Russian, with a delicacy all his

own, would suggest that there was nothing in 'The Sportsman's Sketches' which was not infinitely better in 'The Untilled Field,' and thinking that Mr. Moore, in deferring the compliment, might be drawn to quoting any of his many tributes to Tourgenieff, I paused. 'There would not be room for the two of you,' I said to myself, 'and'—(turning to the ghost of Tourgenieff)—'you have purchased enough immortality of Mr. Moore already.' What an ill-assorted trio you are, I thought, for there seemed to be no harmony between them. Tourgenieff, on the kerb, was walking head erect, Dostoieffsky shuffling along by the wall, and Tolstoy, who presented the greatest difficulty, moved along in the middle. As we continued to walk he edged nearer and nearer to Dostoieffsky and made some show of talking, without, however, making an impression, for the author of 'The Brothers Karamzov' seemed to sink farther and farther into himself. By the Court Theatre, it is true, he stopped a moment to talk to a woman of the street, while Tolstoy dropped two pennies into a beggar's pannikin; Tourgenieff only smiled, as though to apologise for our companions. Tolstoy, I thought, has forgotten that he wrote 'Anna Karenina,' or that woman were intended for anything but a prompt to man's moral sense; he will not be welcome. And again, I thought, he will be sure to suggest that art is what he thinks it is, and, awful thought, he may speak of education.

And, waking out of the reverie, I remembered only Dostoieffsky, whom Mr. Bennett had set highest

among the high, and of whom I could never speak with any show of restraint.

But it seems I had not forgotten my ghostly companions, and I told Mr. Moore of them, having first assured him that the idea was taken direct from 'The Storyteller's Holiday.' One of the most delightful of the many delightful things in that book is of a visit Dostoieffsky paid Tourgenieff in Paris, and the record of their conversation.

'And did it happen?' I asked, with genuine interest.

'If it didn't happen,' says Mr. Moore, 'it might have happened—and that is all that concerns us.'

'That is the difficulty with imaginary conversations —none of them happen,' I replied, shaking my head: for the idea of introducing the ghosts of Tourgenieff, Tolstoy, and Dostoieffsky was still with me.

'I could never decide what Tourgenieff would say to you; what you would say to Tourgenieff,' I went on, 'beyond the fact that he would suggest his own "Sportsman's Sketches" possibly fell short of "The Untilled Field," as you would suggest, no doubt, "The Untilled Field" was not "The Sportsman's Sketches." As to Tolstoy, I have no idea what he might say to you, though, without doubt, it would be a great deal. He would begin by defining art——'

'Reading from his pamphlet,' said Mr. Moore.

'And then,' I went on, 'he would suggest woman's highest purpose was to sharpen a man's conscience. . . .'

'And there, you may be sure,' said Mr. Moore, 'I would quote Voltaire: no, it is not Voltaire, for a

word occurs he would not have used—that chastity is the worst form of sexual perversion.'

But, remembering Dostoieffsky and that I was anxious to obtain Mr. Moore's opinion, I decided to say what I had to say quickly, lest my courage fail me. And so I suggested that the revision of the Prayer Book was as nothing to a revision of the Bible, a revision which was to include the Apocrypha, and, when we were worthy of it, there might be certain pieces of 'The Brothers Karamzov,' of 'The Idiot,' of——

'Ah,' said Mr. Moore, guardedly, 'you let your enthusiasms carry you away.'

'No,' I replied, 'with Dostoieffsky there are no enthusiasms. One understands him, or one thinks one does—or one does not. If one understands him, one can forgive him that he wrote bad journalese. If one does not understand him, one remembers also that he was a Russian and a dyspeptic. Bad journalese is one of the seven deadly sins. . . .'

'It is certainly the deadliest,' broke in Mr. Moore.

'Dostoieffsky's style is like a drain-pipe,' I went on, 'but you hear the wind whistling through it—the prophetic wind; and perhaps, too, you can catch a glimpse of the white sky at the top.'

'Dostoieffsky,' and Mr. Moore paused, as though choosing his words, 'Dostoieffsky gives one, why I cannot quite explain, the idea of snow. I think of him as a sculptor in snow, vast, perhaps luminous, but indistinct and brittle. Or if you prefer to think of clay, do so—soft clay which is apt to crumble. You regard it with admiration, but you never fail to ask yourself in-

wardly how long it will last. You expect, perhaps, to see it crumble before your eyes. The designs are great but there is very little material. Better than the word snow is vapour. We see them all indistinctly as in a mist. There is no gainsaying that they are magnificent silhouettes—magnificent shadows; but when you come to examine them clearly, you find they are no more than shadows. Simplicity is a great virtue; beware of losing vitality. The writer's method is direct carving —and in stone. We should not be asked to look through frosted glass at a lot of phantoms moving vaguely about the lawn. He never lost the capacity to agitate, but he lost, or never had, vitality.'

'True,' I said, 'but I have never thought of Dostoieffsky's great characters—Myshkin, Raskolnikov, Stavrogin, the Karamzovs—as characters at all, rather as "projections," the sum total of earth's experience wrestling in the bottomless pit—heaven or hell —and on our behalf, since they are ourselves.'

'Well,' added Mr. Moore, 'I accept Dostoieffsky with reservations, which you apparently do not. I remember reading "The Brothers Karamzov." Everyone became so very excited. "What is it all about?" I asked. And then it came to such a pass that one man could not meet another over a glass of beer but they must row each other over the origins of Christianity. However, do not misunderstand me. I should think Dostoieffsky was a much greater man than, let us say, Hall Caine.'

CHAPTER XXII

'THE BROOK KERITH'—ITS GENESIS

'AND SO,' said Mr. Moore, 'what is he going to do?'

'That is true,' I replied, 'what is he going to do?'—playing for time, because the conversation had led on to a subject I could never fully appreciate. A man of letters, whom we both knew, was engaged on a Life of Christ, and it occurred to me that no great purpose would be served. If such there be, it was the work of, perhaps, some Salvation Army lass or some unknown nun, and would contain nothing—and everything; or of a theologian with an immense capacity for research, and would contain everything—and nothing.

'And supposing,' went on Mr. Moore, 'he threw over the Virgin Birth, as I imagine he will, where is he? He can only write another "Brook Kerith." He may write it better. I cannot say. I don't know if it's vanity, but I don't suppose anyone will do anything better for some years at least. Have you read it?'

'No,' I replied, and, to hide my confusion, said that I hoped to, at once.

'Oh, you must read it,' added Mr. Moore, pleasantly: 'that is to say, it is the best thing I have done. It is that book of mine, let us say, which is most likely to be read in twenty-five years' time.'

'But I have often wondered at its genesis.'

'It was a happy inspiration—that was all,' Mr. Moore replied. 'I had long wondered at the character of Christ, as given us. I could not see him, indeed, as having very much character. Platitudes there were in plenty—many august sayings, no doubt: but what was *he*, the underlying man from whom all the teachings issue? Character, who will deny it? is the most important thing of all. In the book, for example, I have drawn John in ten lines—and yet one may sometimes write a million words and the character we try to draw escapes beyond. He must be like someone, I said, but whom? And then the belief gradually grew that he was a prophet. This belief I based on his violence—his cursing of the fig-tree and his "I come with the Sword." Here, I said, is another Jeremiah, another Isaiah. But having decided so far, still the whole thing was to escape me. I could go no farther. It was one day in the old library at Dublin; X thought that perhaps Christ had fallen into a cataleptic fit and recovered in some three hours. There was at least no reason to suppose he died. "My God, yes," I said, "that's it. And he meets Paul twenty years afterwards." Now I had it all complete—it was all done in five minutes! No, not done, for there was more to it than that, and I could go no farther. I tried and tried, but somehow it was no use. Trying was not enough. And then I sat back and saw things as they were; I knew nothing about it—I knew nothing about the country. I hated travelling, what was I to do? But there was no way out. The more I thought over things the more I knew how little I knew. Was there a palm-tree there, hills here,

waters there? And finally, in desperation, I went out to Palestine. And it was the topography—not typography—that made the book. As I rode from Jerusalem to Jericho the vista unfolded itself, and with the vista the story it held. The book itself was written in some thirteen or fourteen months. But then I spent another ten years in revision. In spite of all my efforts, a lot of colloquialisms had crept in. I had been trying to write always in the middle of the language. But when I surveyed my handiwork I saw that it needed purifying, and I set to work again. And so I spent ten years picking out the daisies. Daisies are all right in themselves, but not in a green lawn—and it was a green lawn I needed.'

CHAPTER XXIII

Mr. Moore refuses to generalise on women, and thinks no one but a young man ever imagined he was capable of doing so. 'If they are not artists themselves,' he says, 'they are the cause of a good deal of art,'—and ends up with a quotation from Balzac: 'To be famous and to be loved.'

'WHAT is one to believe?' I thought, but that of itself sniffed a little of Tolstoy, and, before I had gone far down into King's Road, I thought perhaps it was safer not to believe. The Prague correspondent of a great London newspaper had come across an unpublished work of Tolstoy, and had wired over the details, which had appeared in its columns under the heading, 'Woman the Source of Sin.' That, I thought, was a little strong for a newspaper of such broad opinions, but no doubt the sub-editor could justify himself.

'The great Russian writer reveals his intolerance of certain forms of feminism, and a lack of sympathy for women's movements,' the extract read.

'According to him, women differ radically from men, not only physiologically, but also in all their faculties. Consequently, if they wish to develop more fully, they must do so along well-defined lines of their own.' It occurred to me that I had heard views very much like these before, and from a great writer who had little in common with Tolstoy. Mr. Moore had, I remember, suggested that women were better employed sitting in a tower embroidering beautiful tapestries than patting a ball over a net or something of the sort.

But I continued to read.

'Of women in general, Tolstoy expresses no very high opinion. . . . When he is not sceptical of the future development of the sex, he expresses himself with indulgence on its frailty, saying: "Women, like children, lie without even being conscious of it," and "Women have only two emotions, the love of men and the love of children—all the rest is the creation of the imagination."'

Tolstoy either knows a great deal or nothing at all, I thought, and, remembering I was going down to Ebury Street, I wondered how I could introduce the subject. If I ask Mr. Moore what he thinks of women, I said to myself, I shall certainly know more than I do. The opportunity did not come at once, did not indeed occur during the entire evening: for Mr. Moore spoke of education, of Balzac, of Shakespeare, and many other things. But as I was leaving, and putting on my coat, I suggested there was one subject that was broached to every visitor to this country, whether he be a police officer studying our traffic, a film star come to discover his ancestral home, or a millionaire come to spend a fortnight at the Savoy . . .

'And that is . . . ?' enquired Mr. Moore.

'The modern woman,' I put in quickly.

'What do you mean by a "modern woman"?' answered Mr. Moore.

'A woman,' I replied.

'Oh, well,' said Mr. Moore. 'Oh, well. I mean to say . . .' And then, as though recovering from his surprise, 'How on earth can one possibly generalise on

that? You might as well ask me to talk on—on air. Or you might just as well ask me to define something like "tragedy." Woman—and every woman different! I don't know every woman in the world—how can I possibly generalise?'

'That's the fault of young men, I suppose,' I added, quickly trying to cover up my tracks. 'They think women have a kind of common denominator. Still,' I went on, 'I have just been reading Rabindranath Tagore, and he likens man to the oak and woman to the creeper——'

'A creeper!' broke in Mr. Moore. 'I can't stand epigrams on such a subject. It is just like ——. He will tell you what a man is, if you ask him—he has him there on the dissecting-table. And when he's finished with him, and you go to examine, you find the man is dead. No one but a very young man knows—or ever thinks that he knows—what a woman is. We ought to be thankful for it, for we can say, with a certain amount of truth, that if they are not artists themselves, they certainly make artists—they have, at all events, been the cause of a great deal of art.'

'I was thinking,' I broke in, 'how many young men, at the beginning of their careers, are supposed to despise them.'

'Despise them?' replied Mr. Moore. 'Oh, dear, I've never done that—one cannot very well do that. Why do you laugh? Why, the moment a woman comes into the room the whole atmosphere of the place is changed. And then to talk about despising them! No—anything but that. The only thing of which we can be certain is

that they are different from men, and for that we should be thankful. No one who knows the most elementary things about human nature has ever tried to generalise about women. I have mentioned ——; now turn to Balzac. What does Balzac make Lucien say: "*D'être célèbre et d'être aimé!*" '

'No,' I broke in, 'he first applied those words to himself. Living in a garret, he wrote that he was hungry and his plate was empty, and could think only of being famous and being loved.'

'Ah, well,' answered Mr. Moore, 'fame is a doubtful thing, after all. At all events, he put his own thoughts into the mouth of one of his characters. I remember it perfectly. Pages and pages of description—which carry one nowhere, and then, quite effortlessly it seems, he suddenly strikes a great and abiding human note in the single sentence: "To be famous and to be loved." '

CHAPTER XXIV

Mr. Moore speaks of the Webbs. A literature which no one will read. The fantastic bed.

'HAVE you ever considered how much tapestry there is in great art—in "Urn Burial," for example, or in Landor or Pater—all tapestry!'

So began Mr. Moore one evening.

'Of course, some books manage to exist without it. No one, I suppose, would suggest there is much tapestry in John Stuart Mill, let us say, or . . .'

'The Webbs.'

Mr. Moore paused in his stride and looked up quickly.

'Have you read any of it?' I enquired.

'I have never read any of it, but I have wondered over it, it interests me very much,' he replied. 'These two people devoting a lifetime to a literature people will never read again. I do not suppose the Baron will imagine that people will ever again read the tomes he has written on the subject of the Poor Law, on Statutory Democracy, or the Public Organisation of the Labour Market, or the joint work in seven volumes, so I am told, on English Local Government. Then there is Lady Beatrice, no, not Lady Passfield. Stay, I am forgetting, she is neither, is she not? By what chance were these two brought together? "For one another, though dissimilar," as Shelley would say. They are not dissimilar, no two could be more united; the reflection

in the mere, the shadow in the grass, the image in the stream, shall we say? I had a friend who knew them before Beatrice, wearied of society, thought of higher things; and I always remember Balfour's remark—I forget whether he made it to me or not—"The Webbs," he said; "are those people writing those books still?" But still it seemed to bring up the Webbs before us, they became characters of importance, of height, and stature—something one sees in a museum under glass. It was a simple remark, which is sometimes very good. I continue to think of the names Sidney and Beatrice, in spite of changes, names that are so singularly lighted up in my imagination, a sort of flare. In moments of meditation I can see them at work—a study? Oh, no! To complete their gigantic work no hour of the day or night can be spared. I see them in an enormous bed, and being Victorians there is the tester, perhaps brocade, and on either side tables, solid mahogany, none of the pretty veneer of the eighteenth century. That had all been abolished as unnecessary—and therefore wrong. There are on the writing-tables, papier mâché and blotting pads. They retire to bed—suddenly the Baron jumps up, "An idea, Beatrice!" No more is heard. He turns on the light, and an hour is passed in writing, bequeathing to the world an important point in Poor Law administration. He retires to bed again, and now it is Beatrice's turn. "An idea, Sidney!" and this time it is, perhaps, the Factory Acts. She rises out of bed and seats herself at the other writing-table. Sidney is fearful she will catch cold, she wears no coat. But he is afraid to interrupt,

afraid he might check an idea or inspiration of great value to the world. No sooner is she by his side, than another idea strikes the Baron, and he jumps up.'

'He was not a Peer at that time.'

'No, no, he was not. I should have foreseen, I should have foreseen. And yet he was always a Baron, was he not? At last he dozes a little as he admires that wonderful, luminous idea about the Poor Law, and she, let us imagine, is fearful that he will fall asleep before he gets it down on paper. So the night passes, until wearied by inspiration after inspiration the twain sleep—a broken, scanty, feverish sleep, haunted by the work the morrow will bring. I do not see them in bed after seven. They are out—out of the bed which has been so prolific in inspirations. Sidney the Baron retires to his dressing-room, and the lady's maid comes in. Crinolines, did they come into crinolines? No, they came into the heyday of bustles. Yes, yes, the bustle period, unfortunate, indeed, since they are always sitting down. And so the day is passed in long researches, and so on to another night.

'One speaks of Sarah, of Eleanora,—a Christian name is no impertinence when one speaks of high people. Shall we call her Beatrice? Beatrice, no, the mistress, or stay, I have it, the missus. For she has declined the title, she will not have anyone address her as Lady Passfield. Now I have always been on the side of women, always been attracted by them, always been their admirer. I am Beatrice's admirer, if the Baron will allow me to be an admirer. She at least is consistent—she has set out to write readable literature,

and she would have done it better, perhaps, without the Baron. But honour is due, and if honour is due to anyone, let us accord it to the missus. The fact that she refuses to stir from her original duty brings me over to her side.

'My dear Mr. Goodwin, not one word—but stay, there is another word. The world has always gone in threes. From Heaven to earth and from earth to Heaven, there has always been the trinity. Behind Beatrice and the Baron is the bed. A bed—canopy or tester, which shall it be? No, not a tester—the ordinary four-poster. Had the bed been narrow—no, of great width, which must be understood before you can understand the Webbian literature. Prodigious bed! How many tomes did you say were produced on English Local Government? Seven? Prolific bed! Other beds produce mere children, but this bed has tomes to its credit. But the work of the bed has ceased, the Baron and the missus will write no more. It is hardly to be supposed, for both of them are at an age when literary fecundity slackens. But the bed should not be forgotten. It has accomplished its duty, just as well as the Baron and the missus. It should become a national possession in an age that collects everything and produces nothing. If you like I will subscribe. It will be stored in the priceless solemnity of the Royal Albert Museum, in which everything useless is collected, regardless of value. Do you not agree?'

CHAPTER XXV

Mr. Moore discusses Hardy. A village schoolmaster. Some remarks on peasant speech—and Tess, who speaks in metaphysics.

'HARDY!' said Mr. Moore, and then again, 'Hardy!'

It was on one of the early visits to Ebury Street, and I could only excuse myself on the grounds of youth and ignorance, otherwise I would have known that Mr. Moore had never ranked his great contemporary highly: had, in fact, no place for him at all. Had I, I say, read some of his criticisms, I would have known better than to run off into unqualified praise of the older writer. As it was, I must needs go into extravagances over 'Jude the Obscure' and a panegyric on Hardy generally until I caught Mr. Moore's eye and the words died on my lips. Hitherto the conversation had wandered along aimlessly, as conversation often does, Mr. Moore often content to listen, occasionally interpolating a phrase here and a phrase there. But now his face had suddenly hardened, his eyes seemed alight, the whole being taut. . . .

'Hardy!' he said again, and I wondered if the old gentleman, who was then living peaceably in Wessex, would ever imagine what was to be said at his expense in this upstairs room in Ebury Street.

'That man!' went on Mr. Moore. 'It was not that he could write or could not write. He seems to me nothing—or rather, he is, let us say, a village schoolmaster.'

'Yes,' I said.

'He could not write, I will undertake to say, two lines of correct English.'

'Yes,' I said.

'That is to say, he could not write a grammatical sentence. You may discard grammar altogether, if you wish, but you cannot flop about as Hardy does.'

'No,' I said.

'And his stories are so ridiculous. The story, who will deny, should write the book. It is no use just filling in the shades. I am not setting up any inviolable canons. I say somewhere that the rules of art are made to be broken, just as a woman is dressed in order that she be undressed. But let us take "Tess of the D'Urbervilles." Now, George Eliot, not a great genius, would have seen that the key-stone of that book—no, not the key-stone, the whole theme—was where the girl confesses her previous relations to her husband. Not only George Eliot, but any writer who touched the story, would be unable to avoid the knowledge that the whole thing depended on the handling of the incident. Now, mark what Hardy does. The husband is sitting in a chair, his wife at his knees; and then in a few pages, and in the third person, Hardy disposes of it all. This incident, to which everything should lead up, which we should never be allowed to overlook, is over almost as soon as we realise it has begun. Here, of course, I am only referring to one particular book; but the next charge is applicable to them all, since all his books deal with peasants. Now, peasant speech, if you have knowledge of peasant life you will know, is at once the

most easy and, for that matter, the most difficult of all forms. It is entirely without subterfuge. It is blunt, coarse perhaps, but *vital*. All our own civilised conversation is weakened by the use of abstract terms which, if we ever troubled to enquire, are without meaning. We never, for that reason, reach the foundation of things. We may be complex or whatever it is, but the peasant, who is always himself and, when he speaks, expresses himself, at least *lives*. Good writing is objective writing; and when objective writing is applied to the peasant, there are, doubtless, possibilities of great things. And now let me take you into a village where are gathered Hardy's peasants, or, rather, let Hardy take you there himself, and what will you find: all the rustics speaking subjectively, if they speak even intelligently. And the words! "Now what dost ee think be the *propinquity* of that there church" . . . that sort of thing. I had forgotten Tess. As for her, she speaks in—well, metaphysics.'

'Yes,' I said, wondering whether I had got Hardy aright.

CHAPTER XXVI

Art and the camera: the Haig statue and contemporary sculptors.

AFTER three weeks of wandering by loch and glen I said, 'The day has come for me to forget the spiritual North and re-knit myself to my daily work.' Wherefore I took up a newspaper, a thing I had not done for some time, and the first thing that caught my eye was a controversy about a statue of which all and sundry did not approve. 'An excellent subject,' I said, 'for an article for my book about George Moore. I'll telegraph from Perth.' And when we were seated on either side of the Ebury Street fireplace I asked him if he had read the correspondence that *The Times* was publishing on the making of equestrian statues. 'I will answer you when my cigar has passed its prime.' I waited, but waiting is a long time and the master did not hurry himself. At last he said, 'I always read *The Times* in August, certain to come upon letters explaining the relation of Art to Nature. The letters come from all the various suburbs of London, with never a name at the end of them that I know, which is not astonishing when I think on it. My friends and acquaintances, being all artists, do not write to explain how the destiny of Art is inextricably knitted to that of Nature. A witless artist indeed he must be who is not aware that neither he nor any other man could speak

for three minutes about the relation of Art to Nature and Nature to Art without talking nonsense. Who, then, are the writers of these letters? Without doubt, retired tradesmen or tradesmen on their holidays.'

The conversation dropped, and to recapture Moore's attention I said, 'Their views on the crafts they practise—butchering, baking, candle-stick making—would be interesting and instructive, perhaps even edifying." 'Why not edifying?' he asked; 'a man is always edifying when he speaks out of his experience.' And a reply to his last remark failing me, and dreading a metaphysical discussion, I said, 'Let us abandon general principles and talk about the Haig Memorial.' 'You are quite right, my dear friend,' he replied, 'general principles serve no purpose except to bore. But how am I to avoid general principles whilst discussing the rights of the craftsman to do his own work in his own way?' 'You will find a way,' I answered, 'before this excellent cigar is finished'; and long before it had reached its final ashes Moore had begun to talk of a certain Richard Wormald. 'A sculptor?' I interjected. 'No, Richard Wormald was not a sculptor, but a painter in water-colours, a large-hearted millionaire if ever there was one. We had not met for years, and having come across me again in one of the arcades of the rue de Rivoli he said we must breakfast together, and I was led to the Hotel Regina, where we were taken up in the lift to a rich and spacious suite of rooms on the second floor. A table laid for three caught my greedy eyes, and whilst I wondered who might be the other guests two ladies entered and were introduced

to me as Wormald's travelling companions. An account of their travels was quickly in progress. They had just returned from a long tour in Greece and Italy, and from the delight my company seemed to afford at breakfast, I judged them to have seen too much of each other of late. "Any stranger would have been equally welcome!" I said to myself. "We shall expect you back to dinner at eight o'clock," they called back, "and we will go for a drive in the Bois; or if you like a music-hall better . . ."

'I thanked them, and after a visit to the barber's, I returned to my hotel, where I found a note from Wormald proposing a variety of expeditions. "We are getting on capitally," I said to myself, with a little misgiving in my heart, a little cloud which at the end of the week developed into a very big cloud. "I have been in Paris for a week and have seen nothing but Wormald and his ladies. I must get back to myself and to my own life." But how to do this without returning to England or quarrelling with Wormald I did not know, until one day in a moment of happy inspiration I reproached him for neglecting his art. He opened his portfolio: "I am not thinking of what you have done, but of what you might do," I said; "another series of sketches. You have done English fields again and again. Why not do a town series, Paris at the end of the nineteenth century?" "I am not very good at gable-ends," he answered, "but I will try." And the moment seeming to me to be an excellent one, I took him to the window, saying, "I see your first picture: Frémiet's Jeanne d'Arc, Place des Pyramides. . . . I have got

him!" I said to myself. "Frémiet's Jeanne d'Arc will keep him quiet for many days"; and I looked forward to at least a week by myself. But no more than three days had gone over when I received a letter from Wormald asking me to come to see his water-colour.

'"You work very quickly," I said. "One of your best things." "Nice colour," he replied—an habitual phrase of his. "But why have you changed the pony into a horse?" I asked; "the alteration is very clever, but——" "I haven't made any alteration," he interjected; "I bought a photograph of the statue to help me." "And you worked exclusively from the photograph?" "A photograph," he answered, "does not lie." "It seems that this photograph has told a very big lie," I replied; "a bigger one I have never known—the changing of a pony into a horse sixteen hands high!"

'And full of a turbulent curiosity, I went away to make enquiries, the photograph in my hand; and after long days spent interviewing officials, discovered that many years ago Frémiet was asked if he would be good enough to remove his statue from the Place des Pyramides till certain needed excavations were completed. He agreed to the removal of his statue with unexpected willingness, never complaining of the embarrassment it caused him in his studio, even replying with excuses to the demand for the return of the statue to the Place des Pyramides. He may have carried his duplicity to the extent of pointing out that the statue needed a new patina, counting on the fact that a new patina would distract the attention of the public from the alterations. Be this as it may, nobody noticed that

the sculptor had cut Jeanne free from her charger and mounted her upon a small pony. The sixteen-hands horse held his tail on a level with his spine; the pony's tail was tucked between his legs; but nobody had a memory for these trifling changes.

'Sculpture is an expensive art, and the reconstruction of his statue of Jeanne d'Arc must have cost Frémiet many hundreds of pounds. The corporation was not asked to pay for the alterations; had it been asked, it would have refused. Frémiet kept his secret. I have lived a long time in Paris, and had it not been for Mr. Richard Wormald's water-colour I should never have known that Frémiet remade his statue. Frémiet kept his secret. Had he published it, many would have preferred the big horse to the pony and veterinary surgeons would have been called upon to give their opinion that Jeanne, with all her armour on, could not have gone into battle on a horse less than sixteen hands high, and all the hundred odd nonsensical objections that have been raised against Mr. Hardiman's statue would have been raised against Frémiet's, for Art does not occupy to-day the position it did in the sixteenth century. All and sundry give their opinion of pictures and statues and write letters to the newspapers, striving as well as they can to disguise their preference for photography. But every day they get bolder, and now I hear that a great number of photographs of the real horse that Earl Haig rode are to be submitted to Mr. Hardiman. The argument runs: "There is no more beautiful thing in the world than a real horse. Why have a symbolic horse?" And if Mr.

Hardiman refuses to substitute the photographic horse for the horse that he designed, Lady Haig will have to employ an inferior sculptor, who will answer: "Of course, your ladyship, I can add a few inches to the horse's height, and you have only to tell me whether you would like the tail sticking out or between the horse's legs, or—whichever you please, your ladyship. The last photographs you sent me will be a great help, and so will the stirrups and the bridle; these can be moulded, and after all, the real thing is the right thing."

'So do I foresee the collaboration. Perhaps there is a machine already existing to turn photographs from the flat into the round. If so, all and sundry will clap hands and rejoice exceedingly at the triumph of photography. But in the midst of all this democratic enthusiasm it may well be that Lady Haig will hear a voice whispering deep down in her heart: "Perhaps, after all, the first statue was the better." '

'And now, dear master, having told your anecdote, and told it well, mayhap you will say something about the three statues submitted for judgment?' 'It would be invidious for me to make a choice,' he replied. 'My choice would be no more than my opinion.'

'You think Frémiet's statue of Jeanne d'Arc is the most beautiful statue——' 'I may have said the most beautiful equestrian statue of modern times, for I could not think of another at the moment; nor can I think of anything better at this moment. The statue appeals to me as a very pretty toy, recalling Tanagra rather than Nineveh or Memphis.' 'I beg you to ex-

plain yourself more fully, master.' 'Frémiet's art reflects an epoch rather than eternity; a mountain, a granite rock, convey a sense of permanency, something that was from the beginning and will be to the end.' 'Will you tell me what statue of modern times conveys the sense of permanency which, according to you, is discernible in all great Art?' 'I like to think that if the sculptors of the winged bulls in the British Museum were raised from the dead they would stand in admiration before Hudon's Voltaire. I hear them in my imagination saying: "This statue is not for to-day or for to-morrow but for all time." ' 'And in whom besides Hudon do you discover exceeding lastingness?' 'In Barye,' he answered. 'Barye's wild animals live their lives in the Sahara. His tiger devouring a crocodile is such pure animality that the bronze is out of place in the modern drawing-room; it distracts the babble of polite conversation from the day's doings, and the crowd is alienated without knowing why.' 'And Frémiet's wild animals?' I asked. 'They are domesticated, and in front of them we talk of Proust.'

'One question more and I shall have done. Why do you refuse to reprint your book, "Modern Painting"?'

' "Modern Painting" was written from week to week, for I was eager to learn what I thought about art, and clear thinking cannot be achieved without the aid of writing, by me at least. I cannot include this book in the canon, but copies are procurable from the shelves of second-hand booksellers, and I would recommend it to those who relieve the intolerable leisure of their holidays by writing to *The Times* about the mistakes

that artists make, and how much greater the appeal would be if . . . Forgive me, my dear Mr. Goodwin; I cannot conclude my sentence. We have talked enough about Art for one evening. Moreover, your book is going to press, and we must consider the printer.'

CHAPTER XXVII

OBITER DICTA

SOME men regret the work of their early years: they might just as well regret the work of their later years. I don't want to lose my powers, or, losing them, hope I may be made to realise it in time.

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So many people finish early. They write one good book, and not always that, and then that is the end. One is more likely to write many good books than one good book.

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I have never understood what people mean by an 'original' work. There's precious little originality in a work of genius, and in mediocrity I should say there is none at all.

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Now, in regard to reading, I would best be described as a 'dipper.' I have never had, and never sought, any very studious habits. Composing, ah! that is a different matter. I really think that I would be found composing on an iceberg at the North Pole.

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For twenty years my name was not mentioned in any paper at all, except for just the review of my books. The idea had grown, thanks to certain gentlemen, that my books were indecent. Things have altered now, it is true—it is rather late, that is the only thing.

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I suggest that if you tackle anything, you tackle 'The Brook Kerith.' After a time there is no more that can be said about a book, though, from the point of view of the writer of the article, there is a great deal. What it is, it is, and what it isn't, it isn't. If it is, then no matter what is said to the contrary, it will swim; and if it isn't, no amount of praise will save it from sinking.

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The funny thing about 'The Brook Kerith' is that I don't know how I wrote it. It must have come to me in a kind of dream. And that is why ——, with all his million words, will fail. A man who knows all there is to know about a subject will not write anything of interest.

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The immaculate conception! If God had to send his only son down to patch up the boggle he had already made, then one can believe anything!

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Beliefs die hard. None of us are really free from the teachings of our childhood. There is really no such

thing as a 'free-thinker': for we all, at some time or another, think in terms of our father or, it may be, our mother. Now, consider the case of my dear friend ——, a very delightful man, with the broadest of views on most things. In my latest book, 'Aphrodite in Aulis,' I send the girl over a few hundred yards of water to the island. She was to go unaccompanied. But when I read the passage over to ——, he paused a moment and then, in a voice full of weighty reasoning, said: 'I think someone should go with her.' But this was too much for me. 'No,' I said. 'No, I think that you write beautiful English and I think you say some things as no one said them before, but, my dear man, I really must refuse to introduce the chaperon into ancient Greece.'

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X has said that my prose is the most musical since Shelley. I know that it isn't, but no matter. There comes a time when someone must put his foot down and say 'Damn,' and that is what X did.

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What do people mean by saying they are writing to give satisfaction? What rubbish! If you write about Rubens' 'Descent from the Cross' with the idea of giving satisfaction, there is not much likelihood of your going far. But if you write in order to please yourself, that is another matter.

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That man who writes a book or a play with the idea that it is of no use unless it reaches the big public—'the great British public,' how does it go?—is bound to get left behind sooner or later. He bends the knee, and the public shouts 'Bravo!' and then he bends both knees, and the public shouts 'Bravo, bravo!' and then in a sort of ecstasy he crawls along on his belly and there is a chorus of bravos. And having crawled along on his belly he finds that he can't go any farther, and then it is that the public shouts 'Get out, get out!' and out he has to go. That is the whole story.

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A great number of books and pictures are ruined, I have ruined some myself, through taking bad subjects. You may say, 'I see it like that,' and I reply, 'My dear friend, you may see it in fifty different ways, but I would not advise you to see it in the way that you have.'

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A portrait without the eyes! Why, the only way we have of judging a man is by his eyes.

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Now there is certainly more in 'Ulysses' than in 'Lady Chatterley's Lover.' Lawrence failed there without doubt—no subject, no emotion, no anything. It is very nicely written: a poet and a man of imagination, he could not do otherwise, but it has no subject! It is just the same as if I was to go into the garden and say, 'I will have a spoonful of jam,' and then,

after a while, liking it, decide to have another spoonful and then perhaps another. A man running after a woman all day long, and a woman he doesn't even like! There's no subject there. But many people, and people on whose judgment I can rely, tell me there is something very wonderful in 'Ulysses.' Indeed, a friend of mine finds there something magnificent. It may be—it doesn't matter the slightest to either of us—it may be better than 'The Brook Kerith,' I don't know. I will ask my friend when I see him.

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The only books people read are those straight from the press. People never go back. It's like tepid soup.

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'Waste' is not Granville-Barker's best play. But oh, dear me! When you get to politicians . . . ! What can anyone do?

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Strindberg better than Ibsen! Oh, dear no! There is only one man who can write dialogue, and that is Ibsen. Not only his dialogue, but his perfect sense of craftsmanship—the theme runs like a very fine thread from the first word to the last. It is just as though he takes you by the hand and leads you on, quietly but unhesitatingly. Not a false step. He never has cause to throw up a kind of smoke-screen to hide the deficiencies, which is just what these other people are always doing.

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I have never pretended to have any great claims on the theatre. One can only succeed in one thing, and had I devoted myself to the drama instead of to the novel, it is certain that I would have failed, for the simple reason they would never have put on what I wrote. The theatre is crumbling to nothing, you know. What can you expect with the people who control it?

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That word 'creative'! Why, one ceases to be creative the moment one begins to write. Memory is the mother of the Muses.

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Some people think they have employed language when they write to the baker. The lot of the man-of-letters is really a very unhappy one. Most people are convinced in their own minds they can do it much better —if they only had the time!

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One can't improve upon Nature. One may get a good line where Nature leaves off——

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Everything in this life shows a lack of proportion. Look at tennis. They used to play it in the backyard, and now must have a crowd of 60,000 spectators.

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I have never made a woman angry in my life. I have made men angry—but never a woman.

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Hall Caine can write, you know. I remember seeing a sentence of his; it must have been three inches long, that is to say, deep, and perfectly balanced.

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I am getting rather tired of Degas—too much like a newspaper cartoon.

* * * *

Oh yes, I have got an enemy or two, but I don't wish to attack them. Let them go on. It is true I do not court their society, but I think they are very useful—they help me from being an unread classic. But as the libels accumulate—I shall not mind—they will find out one of these days that a number of personal remarks can only be attributed to personal reasons and will look rather foolish.

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Of course sex equality, I think that is what they call it, is a farce, and women when they find that pleasure robbed of danger is no longer a pleasure will end it themselves. Nowadays, from what I hear, people think devilish little of a woman if she has not had at least three lovers before twenty.

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One must become inured to criticism. Why, look at my start. Edmund Yates when he came across 'Pagan Poems' had a column in 'The World,' then a mighty organ of public opinion, under the heading 'A Bestial Bard.' 'The book ought to be burnt by the common hangman,' he said, 'and the author whipped at a cart-wheel.' Poor little book!

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The trouble with the book trade is not that there are too many books so much as too many masterpieces. Nowadays a publisher is very unlucky if he does not handle at least thirty-six masterpieces during the season.

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And so they have raided Lawrence's pictures! But the funny thing about it all—and I have seen no mention of it—is that they took away several Blakes. Perfectly true—a moral police officer, whom praise to heaven they will not let into the Tate, or perhaps it would be just as well if they did—carried away a number of excellent reproductions of the work of Blake. Of course, they took them back afterwards, but that does not do away with the fact that they were confiscated in the first instance. The moral is—if it is safe to draw a moral—that the time will come when no remaining example of pictorial art will be safe. Raphael will be impugned one of these days; Michael Angelo easily. I have great fears for any copies of 'The Last Judgment.' Perhaps on the programme they will refer to

him as Angelo, and that would be enough! But what can you expect when you send the police rampaging through these places? Now there is a proposal that in the case of a seized book or seized pictures, neither the author's nor the painter's name, nor his work, should be mentioned. It is the Bastille, the *lettre de cachet* all over again. The complexion put upon all this is that only one man in 10,000 thinks at all. Unfortunately, they can speak—but think—no!

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It annoys me to read in the paper, 'there can be no doubt that'—and then to find, after the pronoun, the most questionable opinions. 'That,' let us say, 'one of the most remarkable novels in the world is "Wuthering Heights." ' There is no doubt that—yes, but here I am safe—there is no doubt that there is no standard. Every book appeals to different people in different ways. Now Landor is to me the greatest figure in English literature; I have got more out of Landor than out of Shakespeare. That will horrify everyone. The fact that the Banquo scene in 'Macbeth'—a scene which jumps to the eye—was overlooked, encourages me, obliges me, to think that no one reads Shakespeare. It obliges me to think that those people who write to the papers, if they have read Shakespeare through once, have done so perhaps no more than twice. I should not be surprised if they devote no more than three or four hours a day to our national bard—an hour before breakfast perhaps, an hour before lunch. . . .

But as I was saying about Landor—it only means that I think so. I do not mean to say that you should go round the corner and read Landor. I do not mean that every child of six should think and agree with me. I merely mean that he is so to me, and I have always written criticism for myself. You cannot put me in prison for saying that.

What has chilled Landor in the mind of the public is his unfailing wisdom. Nothing chills so much as wisdom; the ordinary man will never like it. There is more beauty, more knowledge, more character there than in twenty Shakespeares, but, of course, it is wisdom and that is anathema.

* * * * *

People wonder what is style—style is the simplest thing in the world to define. The question a man has to face before putting pen to paper is whether he should just transcribe the language of the street as it is, without altering a word of it, or whether he should select, pass it through a filter or, if you like, a strainer. An example will make my meaning clear. If you are writing of how a man tackles a question you might say: 'He mucked up the subject' if you wish to transcribe the street, or if you wish to invest it with dignity of style you might say: 'He has not studied the subject sufficiently.'

Apparently a number of writers—it seems the majority of modern writers—are quite content with the 'mucking up.' It is indeed bad taste, or bad art, which is the same thing, to avoid 'the muck.' There are beau-

tiful expressions invented by the people, it is true, but accidentally so. It is certainly not always the case. They may be used by a writer if he uses them with care. The writer should never lose sight of the spoken language—if he does so, he will write so pedantically that his thoughts, his ideas, will not transpire.

Stevenson comes to mind. I think when he was canoeing he speaks of a sudden 'plump of rain'—a very beautiful expression. He took it from a 'plump' of spears, seeing as he did the image of spears in driving rain, but he took care not to do it again. Writing, if it is an art at all, is a compromise.

* * * * *

Now Mr. Ervine, who, so I am to gather from the batch of letters I am receiving from kindly disposed correspondents, has been attacking me somewhere or another, cites this very case of style. (Here is one, you see, with a pencil scrawl—'Now, George, what are you going to do about it—take it lying down?' 'Take it lying down?'—a good expression in its place, as good an example, perhaps, as 'mucking it up.')

Apparently we differ on the subject. Mr. Ervine objects to style as his master does. I would say: 'He has not studied the subject sufficiently,' or, as he might say: 'He must muck it up.' And because of that, he goes on to say that since I don't 'muck it up,' I don't create character. He does not see a character in 'The Mummer's Wife.' What is the name of the fat man there, Dick Lennox—well, Henley, who is not contemptible, thought him one of the most real characters

in English literature. I do not want to say that myself, nor do I think that, but I quote it to prove how great minds occasionally differ.

And Mr. Arnold Bennett, whom Mr. Ervine admires, said over and over again and in print that 'The Mummer's Wife' inspired him to write about 'The Five Towns'—in fact it was his first inspiration, not only to write novels, but to write at all, at least in that vein. We all have fathers, some of us many fathers, but the object of most children is to deny their parentage and to try and persuade people they come from the moon. He (Mr. Ervine) does not speak of 'Esther Waters.' The reason is not far to seek. His instinct would tell him that Esther Waters is possibly a character, and so he leaves out everything that interferes with his theory. And so he is able to say that I write well, but say nothing of interest. Well, I suppose you cannot write without saying something of interest somewhere or another. I am too busy to look for it, and if someone finds it, I beg of him not to send it to me. I have too much on hand to care much about the whole thing, and, after all, everybody is free to his own opinions.

* * * * *

'Am I disturbing you?'

'Forget me, friend, in the interest of the *Evening Standard*. I am burnishing the tail of an epigram.'

All that was of interest in the newspaper was consumed before he rose from the writing-table to read with a merry voice:

'*Vraiment, vous relisez Concierge! N'importe le lieu:*

office, plage, boudoir, caserne, atelier de peinture, bordel, c'est un concierge qui nous conduit. Je croyais que son règne tirait à sa fin dans les loges . . . mais il y a toujours des attardés.'

'And against whom is this shaft directed?'

'His name is not spoken in Gilead.' After a pause: 'Would you rob your readers of the pleasure of a riddle? Let the editor of the *Evening Standard* award prizes One, Two, Three, and some consolation prizes for the best answer to: "Who is *concierge* and who is the *attardé*?" '

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Have you heard what the Manchester School say? Have you heard of the three towns that are going to absorb the landscape in 100 years? It has been predicted, it is, indeed, desired. It is desired more or less consciously by people who resign themselves to what they consider inevitable; in resigning themselves to it they are accomplishing it. At any rate, we have the machine whereby it can be done—forcible education. Not one of these wiseacres considers whether forcible education can change a man by one hundredth. What I wish to say is it would be well to consider, if it be not too late, whether education and agriculture are compatible. I do not think they are. By that I do not mean that people should not read a book, but they should not be induced to trek out of the country into the towns and be turned into manufactured wastrels who have votes and nothing else. They all believe it, everyone, even intelligent people, for it seems ingrained

in man to believe that, because he got on without education, his son would get on better with it. The very contrary is the case. We give all this money to agriculture, but it will not delay the destruction of the country. It is implicit with forcible education. Politicians are forced always to compromise. In other words, they can do nothing definite. Paul must be pleased and Peter must be pleased; Paul gives way and Peter gives way also, and so the thing continues—useless measures, useless laws, which only touch the surface of man's life. The dole which is going to be given to the farmer is just one of these. As long as a boy is to be dragged out of the country and to have the curriculum poured down his back, the destruction of England will proceed apace. If rural England is to be saved, it must be saved by the abolition of forcible education. People must grow up and live in the country and know nothing about the town—a great deal about the hills and fields, downland and lowland. Believe me, the opinion is gaining ground among all classes that the Education Acts are no use—that people must educate themselves or remain uneducated. We have talked about this before, but it cannot be talked about too much. Rural England cannot be saved by doles, but only by being left undisturbed.

There is one thing more—the birth-rate. England is large enough to support 5 or 6 or 7 or perhaps 10 millions. When there are more than that, people must emigrate. But then the world is no bigger than a bandbox—what must be done? The saviour who is to come will be a woman—Marie Stopes! She should have a

monument in every market-place. If she could have two apostles like Beatrice and Sidney Webb, then, perhaps, we might see the light.

* * * * *

It is true that not every writer can write a novel, just as it is true that every novelist is not always a writer. People never seem to realise there is such a thing as a narrative gift—the power to tell a story. But now because the novel is so popular, everyone with any power of expression in writing at all, poets, essayists, historians, and almost everybody who has ever held a pen—clerks, for all I know—seem to think they know how to write a novel. Of course, it is absurd, and what surprises me is they never seem to realise what the technique of a novel means; how it all has to be planned out to a nicety, every chapter decided on before the act of writing commences. Even then, as in my case, I often find that, in spite of the most carefully laid plans, things begin to go wrong and have to be done all over again.

Look at that chap Lawrence, a man of plenty of talent. He has written at least one good book, 'Sons and Lovers,' but even there he did not know how he was going to end it. Of course, if I were to quote other instances, I should have to say the writers did not know how they were going to begin.

A NOTE ON THE TYPE IN WHICH THIS BOOK IS SET

This book is set in a type called Scotch. There is a divergence of opinion regarding the exact origin of this face, some authorities holding that it was first cut by Alexander Wilson & Son, of Glasgow, in 1837, while others trace it back to a modernized Caslon old style brought out by Mrs. Henry Caslon in 1796. Its essential characteristics are sturdy capitals, full rounded lower case letters, the graceful fillet of the serifs and a general effect of crispness.

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